A RE-COMMUNICATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF REALITY-ALTERING EVENTS ON ORGANISATIONAL INTERACTION BEHAVIOUR

by

MARLA KOONIN

submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

COMMUNICATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: Prof R Barker

CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr F du Plooy-Cilliers

DECEMBER 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES vi
LIST OF FIGURES vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS vii
DECLARATION viii
DEDICATION ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS x
ABSTRACT xv

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT 1

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background to the study 2
1.3 Purpose of the study 5
1.4 Relevance of the topic and other research in the field 7
1.5 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of communication 14
1.6 Conceptualisation of key concepts 15
1.6.1 Disclosure 15
1.6.2 Co-constructed social reality 16
1.6.3 Reality-altering event 17
1.6.4 Interaction behaviour 18
1.6.5 Sexual identity 19
1.6.6 Communication strategies in the interpersonal context 21
1.6.7 Re-communication 22
1.6.8 Organisational context and organisational communication 23
1.7 Research paradigm: Interpretivism 25
1.7.1. Paradigmatic positions of Interpretivism 25
1.7.2 Interpretivism: epistemological and ontological positions 26
1.7.3 Method of inquiry: humanistic scholarship 29
1.8 Research design: qualitative research 30
1.8.1 Basic research 31
1.8.2 Exploratory-descriptive research 32
1.8.3 Strategy of inquiry 32
1.9 Research problem and questions 33
1.9.1 Formulation of the research problem 33
1.9.2 Research questions 33
1.9.3 Research goal 33
1.10 Thesis outline 34

1.11 Conclusion 36

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM 39

2.1 Introduction 39
2.2 Symbolic interactionism 43
2.2.1 Ideological foundation of symbolic interactionism 43
2.2.2 Historical overview of the foundations of symbolic interactionism 45
2.2.3 George Herbert Mead's contribution to symbolic interactionism 47
2.2.4 Herbert Blumer's contribution to symbolic interactionism 57
2.2.5 The significant symbol 60
2.2.6 Key concepts of the ideology of symbolic interactionism 61
2.2.7 Critique of symbolic interactionism 64
2.2.8 The relevance of symbolic interactionism to this study 66
2.3 Social constructionism 75
2.3.1 Ideological foundation of social constructionism 75
2.3.2 Premises of social constructionism 79
2.3.3 Features of communication from a social constructionist perspective 80
2.3.4 The critique of social constructionism 82
2.3.5 The relevance of social constructionism to this study 83
2.4 Constructivism 84
2.4.1 Ideological foundation of constructivism 84
2.4.2 Construct systems and cognitive complexity 87
2.4.3 Critique of constructivism 91
2.4.4 Significance of constructivism to this study 91
2.5 Conclusion 92

CHAPTER 3: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY, CLIMATE AND CULTURE AND DISCLOSURE 95

3.1 Introduction 95
3.2 Identity in relation to symbolic interactionism and disclosure in the organisational context 98
3.2.1 Historical background of identity 98
3.2.2 Sexual orientation versus sexual identity 101
3.2.3 Heteronormativity 103
3.2.4 Professional identity 106
3.2.5 The role of identity in an organisational context: organisational identity 109
3.3 Disclosure of personal information and the social penetration theory 111

3.3.1 The concept of disclosure 111
3.3.2 Social penetration theory as an application of disclosure 113
3.4 Organisational communication 120
3.4.1 Interpersonal communication: strategic versus spontaneous communication .. 121
3.4.2 Informal communication 125
3.5 Organisational climate and culture 127
3.5.1 Organisational climate 128
3.5.2 Organisational culture 129
3.5.3 Development of organisational climate and culture 131
3.5.4 Characteristics of cooperative organisational climates and cultures: constructive and supportive cultures versus defensive cultures 135
3.6 Conclusion 143

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 146

4.1 Introduction 146
4.2 Research approach and design 147
4.3 Application of a qualitative design 149
4.4 Strategy of inquiry: Phenomenology 151
4.5 Sampling 154
4.5.1 Unit of analysis 154
4.5.2 Non-probability sample 155
4.5.3 Sample size 158
4.6 Data collection methods 160
4.6.1 Semi-structured in-depth interview 161
4.6.2 Narrative inquiry 165
4.7 Data analysis method 168
4.7.1 Thematic textual analysis 168
4.7.2 Coding 173
4.8 Trustworthiness of the study 176
4.9 Ethical considerations 180
4.10 Conclusion 183

CHAPTER 5: RE-COMMUNICATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ELEMENTS INFLUENCING DISLCOSURE DECISIONS AND SELF-PRESERVATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES 185

5.1 Introduction 185
5.2 Core conjectures from an interpretivist paradigm 187

5.3 Re-communication conceptual framework 189
5.4 Elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure 191
5.4.1 Physical location 192
5.4.2 Organisational identity 194
5.4.3 Disclosure motivators 201
5.4.4 Disclosure detractors 209
5.5 Self-preservation communication strategies 218
5.5.1 Avoidance strategies 219
5.5.2 Personal pronoun game 223
5.5.3 Non-conforming strategies 225
5.6 Conclusion 229

CHAPTER 6: RE-COMMUNICATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) AND RE-COMMUNICATION 233

6.1 Introduction 233
6.2 Findings on the reality-altering event (Disclosure) 234
6.2.1 Communication disclosure strategies 237
6.2.2 Spontaneous communication disclosure 243
6.2.3 Externally controlled disclosure 248
6.3 Findings on re-communication 255
6.3.1 Findings on positive re-communication 255
6.3.2 Findings on negative re-communication 265
6.4 Conclusion 279

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 282

7.1 Introduction 282
7.2 Relevance of the theories to the findings 283
7.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism 284
7.2.2 Social constructionism 286
7.2.3 Constructivism 287
7.2.4 Sexual and professional identities 287
7.2.5 Disclosure 288
7.2.6 Organisational communication 289
7.2.7 Organisational climates and cultures 289
7.3 Research purpose, problem and questions reviewed 291
7.4 Key findings 294
7.5 Research questions 295

7.5.1 Research question 1 295
7.5.2 Research question 2 297
7.5.3 Research question 3 299
7.5.4 Research question 4 302
7.6 Research goals reviewed 305
7.6.1 Primary research objective 305
7.6.2 Secondary research objectives 305
7.7 Developing the re-communication conceptual framework 323
7.8 Limitations 328
7.9 Heuristic value and suggestions for further research 330
7.10 Contributions of the study 331
7.11 Conclusion 333

SOURCES CONSULTED 340

ADDENDA 369

Addendum A: Summary of the dominant themes and sub-themes emerging from the data analysis 369
Addendum B: Informed consent: Participation in semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry 389
Addendum C: Standard semi-structured interview questions 397
Addendum D: Informed consent: Participation in narrative inquiry 401
Addendum E: Instruction for narrative inquiry 409

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Similar local research 8
Table 2.1: Overview of symbolic interactionism (SI) in relation to this study 68
Table 3.1: Types of identity in a symbolic interactionist framework 99
Table 7.1: Sub-themes associated with each broad theme of the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure of sexual identity in the organisational context 296
Table 7.2: Sub-themes associated with each of the broad themes of self-preservation communication strategies 298
Table 7.3: Sub-themes associated with each of the broad themes of the reality-altering event 300
Table 7.4: Sub-themes associated with each of the broad themes of the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour 302

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Researcher's personal conceptualisation of the social penetration theory's "onion" based on the previous sources 119
Figure 5.1: Elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure 192
Figure 5.2: Self-preservation communication strategies 218
Figure 6.1: Reality-altering event 235
Figure 6.2: Positive re-communication 256
Figure 6.3: Negative re-communication 266
Figure 7.1: Positive re-communication 307
Figure 7.2: Negative re-communication 309
Figure 7.3: Self-preservation communication strategies 314
Figure 7.4: Reality-altering event 318
Figure 7.5: Three dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework 326
Figure 7.6: Re-communication conceptual framework 328

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IIE	Independent Institute of Education
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning
MGI	Midrand Graduate Institute
NDLTD	Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations
NIHSS	National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences
NRF	National Research Foundation
OCI	Organisational Culture Inventory
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
SAHUDA	South African Humanities Deans Association
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UNISA	University of South Africa

DECLARATION

Name: Marla Koonin
Student number: 50782185
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy in Communication (PhD)

A re-communication conceptual framework: perceived influence of reality-altering events on organisational interaction behaviour

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

27/11/2019

Signature Date

DEDICATION

This PhD is dedicated to Detective Warrant Officer Delene Grobler-Koonin, my superhero, wife, warrior woman and Meme to our darling son, Jake Marcus, the only female member of her elite national Hawks TOMS Unit in the South African Police Services. On the morning of 5 March 2020, just weeks after I received the results of my PhD, she was gunned down and killed in the line of duty. It epitomises how much I respect and hero-worship her. ~

The hero of my soul, Delene Grobler-Koonin: you not only inspired this study because of the profound influence you have had on helping people during their worst reality-altering events for two decades as a detective in the South African Police Services, but you have also restored my faith in humanity. You are a hero to countless battered and bruised souls, their pillar of strength and beacon in the darkness, as they disclose and recount horrific reality-altering events. You fight tirelessly in your quest for justice – particularly for women and children – and few people know you, do so while battling your own reality-altering event of living with Polycystic Kidney Disease. You epitomise the tenets of a superhero and walking life's journey alongside a superhero is an honour.

Little did I know that, just weeks after writing this dedication to you, I would have to go through the very thing I wrote about and live through my worst reality-altering event without you, the superhero that everyone has had the privilege of knowing. Delene, you honoured your calling in the most profound way. My soul will forever be halved, as will my heart, because part of me has gone to *Olam Habayit* with you. You and I are now bound by an eternal love.

I am not the same person I was before I met you, for you are my greatest-reality altering event. I have been so profoundly influenced by you and you taught me how to be a parent and, without doubt, a better person. In this way, our son, Jake Marcus, will always experience your influence. I hope there is a great deal of you in me now to help me on this next journey. When Jake's soul chose ours as parents, he knew he would have his work cut out for him, for he would always be the son of a superhero. Jake Marcus is your legacy. I will honour and respect that and I will raise him in the way we have planned. I will always weave you into our lives, for you are imprinted on his soul. More than anything, I wish I had Option A, but I know you would expect me to kick the hell out of Option B and make sure that your legacy lives on in the soul of our son whom you

cherished. I promise not to let the bullet that ripped through you and left the world a shattered place define who you were. I will ensure that you are remembered – alive and larger than life – because superheroes just cannot live here, among us.

You paid the ultimate price. You will be remembered as a hero and, in a state funeral, under our nation's flag, saluted by many you were laid to rest among other leaders, who changed our society. With my PhD, I personally salute you for making the world a better place. How many people can truly say that?

Zikhronah Livrakha, my soul mate. Until we meet again, I will continue to love you. Rest gently and in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The only thing we know is where we have been and the journeys we have taken. I would like to acknowledge the following people for co-creating my life journey with me. Without your influence, I would not have been who or where I am today and I humbly thank you.

- Dr Franzél Du Plooy-Cilliers, my supervisor and mentor:
  The day I walked into your first-year class at RAU 21 years ago, you altered my entire way of thinking, re-constructed my reality and became one of the most profound influencers on my mind – then and now. You have left your golden footprints alongside me every step of the way and it is fitting I started and completed my academic journey under your supervision. There are no words to express the deep and meaningful way you have impacted my life journey, or the respect I have for the depth of your insight into all endeavours. This dedication is my small way of saying: I am where I am today because of the profound mentor, educator, supervisor and friend you are.

- My darling son, Jake Marcus Koonin:
  You are my greatest reality-altering event – you made me a mother. I am eternally grateful that your soul chose mine to be your mom. You are the only person in this world that will ever know what my heartbeat sounds like from the inside and the day you were born, my heart began to beat outside of my body. Nothing holds a light to what you bring to my life or how much I love you.

- My Supervisor, Prof. Rachél Barker:

  I selected doing my PhD at UNISA just so I could have you as a supervisor. Your efficiency and effectiveness as a supervisor are epic and your insight as an organisational communication expert is unrivalled. I am forever changed by your influence, supervision and insights and forever grateful for your care and professionalism.

- My unbelievable participants:
  This study only exists because of you and, although you remain anonymous for ethical reasons, you are warriors and heroes, who allow your voices to help others by bravely baring your reality-altering events. You are the richest of souls, for you enrich others.

- My parents, Ellisheva and Jonathan:

  You epitomise the blessing all children deserve – the most supportive, loving and wonderful parents. I am who I am because of the two of you and I cannot imagine a world without your profound influence in it.

- My darling sister, Dr Sheree Koonin:

  Through your work as a plastic surgeon, you positively alter peoples' reality in the most encouraging way. In another life, I wish to come back with your brilliance. You are not only my sister but also my best friend and I am beyond thankful that I have been gifted to live my life alongside yours. There is nothing I would not do for you and no words can express what you mean to and do for me.

I recognise some of the profound leaders who have enhanced the organisational cultures of which I have been part and have influenced my life and career:

- Professor Benjamin Anderson:

  To say you saved my soul is an understatement. – You saw inside me and connected the dots of the person I once was and wished to be again and re-ignited my passion in everything. You altered my reality and co-constructed a new one with me in the most meaningful way. There are not enough words to express my connection with

you, but I know you know. Wherever our paths diverge, I hope to have you on mine – always.

- Dr Felicity Coughlan:

  I attribute my knowledge and skills in higher education to you. I do not think there is anyone who could rival the depth of your knowledge of this landscape. I owe my career success to you because of the countless opportunities you afforded me and the critical and valuable lessons under your tutelage. I owe a debt of gratitude to you that could never be repaid.

- To the memory of the late Jacqueline Aldersley, my work mother and the most kind-hearted human being:

  Although you lost your battle to your reality-altering event, I promised you I would do two things for you: become a mom and do my PhD on this topic. I hope you are proud of me today. I miss you so much.

- Gloria Castrillon:

  If there is one leader whom I aspire to be like, it is you! I have never met someone who could mentor and manage with the same measure of strength and assertiveness as care and compassion. You are the most ethical and inspiring person for whom I have ever worked. You are one of the leading and most brilliant minds in higher education for a reason. I admire, respect and adore you.

- Dr Anne-Ka van den Hoek:

  You provided me with care, guidance and insight towards seeing the world in an entirely different light and one that was a much better place to the one I saw. You taught me the true meaning of integrity.

- Professor Sonja Verwey:

  You harnessed my love and passion for the field of Communication and Research by giving me the chance at a junior level to be your research assistant. You always said such special things to encourage me right up until just before I submitted my PhD. It was both sad and poignant for me that the day I submitted my PhD you passed on so suddenly.

Throughout my career, I have been honoured to be surrounded by some of the most brilliant minds in the higher education landscape.

- There are too many names to mention, but you know who you are and I thank all these colleagues, in particular those at UJ, MGI, IIE and the Da Vinci Institute, who co-created the best workplace realities with me and accepted me for who I am.

- To my Master's supervisor, Andrea Crystal: you are not only someone I consider a friend, but also the person who started my journey on thesis writing and an incredible academic mind who is so missed in academia.

- I would like to make special mention of the executive and council of the Da Vinci Institute, my current work home. I have never worked in a team with such cohesion and every one of you have left your multi-coloured footprints of remarkability all over my heart. Special mention goes to Prof Ben Anderson, Marizanne Burger, Louise Fuller, Prof Krishna Govender, Thrishan Naicker and Sushie Padayachee: you have shifted my entire paradigm on what co-created workspaces actually involves and how deep, safe and meaningful work relationships can be.

- To the Da Vinci Institute Chairperson of Council, Sechaba Motsieloa, and President, Prof Edward Kieswetter: thank you for helping me let my light shine.

- To the incredible support stars of this study, none of this would be possible without all of you. Thank you:

  The remarkable Dawie Malan at the UNISA Library;
  Nare Mashiane at the Da Vinci Institute Library;
  Soekie van Gass at the UNISA Communication Department;
  Carmen Meyer who was my right-hand person for many work milestones and offered me critical support in the early stages of my PhD;
  My right-hand man in everything work related, Storm Thomas; and
  My editor, Lucia Geyer: I have never known an editor with your depth or attention to detail.

- I mention some of my dearest friends: thank you for being the most critical support network, in motherhood, life, my career and this journey. May we share life-long

friendships, for you are always the people who walk in, when everyone else is walking out. Kamini Naidoo, Nox Buthelezi, Kate Remas, Laverne Machiridza, Sasha Hurly, Vanessa Gray, Den Alcock, Debbie Alcock, Gabi Teren, Andrea Crystal, Yvonne Wolhuter, Mariana van der Walt, Marizanne Burger, Mariek Dettbarn, Heather Goode, Cheryl Siewerski, Shevon Lurie, Sarah Williams, Jenny Blake, Johan Vorster, David Patricios and Thrishan Naicker.

- During the process of my PhD, I lost four special friends to their own reality-altering events. I promised each of them I would be a voice for the one they lost – when they passed on and also when they were diagnosed and their reality and interaction behaviour were altered forever.

  Thea, Vanoise, Jacqui and Leonie: you are not forgotten and you always have a voice in our home. Rest gently and in peace. Always.

- The financial assistance of UNISA is hereby acknowledged.

- The financial assistance of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, in collaboration with the South African Humanities Deans Association towards this research is hereby acknowledged.

  Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NIHSS and SAHUDA.

ABSTRACT

The researcher set out to gain an in-depth understanding of the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication). The alteration in interaction behaviour referred to within the context of this study, is the communication phenomenon identified, explained and labelled as part of the study, which the researcher termed “re-communication”. This study partly aims at developing a re-communication conceptual framework that explains the re-communication phenomenon.

In order to explain this unexplored communication phenomenon and develop a re-communication conceptual framework for it, the study focuses on how either strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised in any reality-altering event to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual, who experienced a reality-altering event, or by persons or forms of communication external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure becomes the reality-altering event.

Therefore, the proposed re-communication conceptual framework firstly addresses the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure. Secondly, it focusses on self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosing or concealing the reality-altering event. Thirdly, the framework focuses on the actual reality-altering event, which, in this case, occurs when a gay individual’s sexual identity is disclosed to colleagues. Lastly, the framework looks at re-communication, which involves a perceived alteration in communication post-disclosure due to the altered reality. It is argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague is altered from a position of being unaware of the individual being gay to becoming aware.

It is further argued that, because heterosexuality is regarded as the norm and the language and meaning ascribed to dominant symbols in society support heteronormativity, people often assume that a colleague is heterosexual and construct their reality based on this notion. Going into an interaction, both the gay individuals and their colleagues have their own social reality, which they have constructed through their experiences, as well as the co-constructed social reality they share with each colleague with whom they interact.

This study was conducted within an interpretivist research paradigm and from the position of the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism. A qualitative, exploratory research design was selected to collect the data by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews and narratives. Based on the insights provided by the participants, re-communication as a communication phenomenon was identified, explained and labelled and the resultant re-communication framework was developed. The re-communication conceptual framework was synergised by means of a thematic textual analysis and was guided by a number of assumptions and postulations arising from a strong theoretical foundation and a comprehensive literature review, which were supported by the findings.

In this study, it was found that a reality-altering event is complex and multiple elements influence the way in which gay individuals' sexual identity are disclosed or not disclosed within the organisational context. However, it has been discovered that communication is the vehicle for self-preservation and for disclosing information that will lead to a reality-altering event. Regardless of how small the influence or how limited the time, post the reality-altering event, the disclosure influences interaction behaviour (communication) and alters the co-constructed social reality between gay individuals and their colleagues.

The colleagues go from a position of not knowing an individual was gay to knowing. It is noted that disclosure of a sexual identity and/or any other reality-altering event is not a once off reality-altering event, but rather a continuous process for gay individuals, because each time a new colleague enters the organisational contexts of gay individuals, they need to consider if – and if so, how – they want to disclose. In some cases, disclosure take places by others and the gay individual needs to decide how to deal with colleagues now knowing s/he is gay.

The most significant contribution of the study is the identification, explanation and labelling of a previously unexplored communication phenomenon – that of re-communication – and the development of a re-communication conceptual framework that could contribute to the organisational reality in a two-fold manner. Firstly, such a framework will provide insights into and possible sense making of the disclosure experiences of gay individuals in the organisational context. Secondly, the outcome illustrates the importance of inclusive and positive organisational climates and/or cultures and the concomitant impact of positive engagements on organisational practices such

as inclusive climates and cultures for sharing, employee loyalty, better team cooperation, trust among employees, increased employee wellbeing and more effective communication processes within organisations.

Key terms

Interaction behaviour (communication), reality-altering event, socially constructed reality, disclosure of sexual identity, symbolic interaction, constructionism, constructivism, organisational communication, organisational climate and culture, interpersonal communication in organisations

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he is not the same man. ~ Heraclitus

1.1 Introduction

The researcher set out to gain an in-depth understanding of the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication). Within the context of this study, the alteration in interaction behaviour referred to is the communication phenomenon identified, explained and labelled as part of this study, which the researcher termed "re-communication". Another purpose of this study is to develop a re-communication conceptual framework that explains the re-communication phenomenon.

In order to explain this unexplored communication phenomenon and develop a re-communication conceptual framework for it, the study focuses on how strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised in any reality-altering event to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual experiencing a reality-altering event or persons or forms of communication external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure becomes the reality-altering event. Therefore, the re-communication conceptual framework developed in this thesis, firstly, includes elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure and, secondly, it focusses on self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosing or concealing the reality-altering event. Thirdly, the framework focuses on the actual reality-altering event, which, in this case, occurs when a gay individual's sexual identity is disclosed to colleagues. Lastly, the framework looks at re-communication, whereby there is a perceived alteration in communication post-disclosure, due to the altered reality. Within the context of this study, it is argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague is altered from a position of being unaware the individual is gay to becoming aware.

It is further argued that, because heterosexuality is the norm and the language and meanings ascribed to dominant symbols in society support heteronormativity, people often assume that a colleague is heterosexual, thereby constructing their reality based

on this notion. Going into an interaction, both the gay individuals and their colleagues will have their own socially constructed reality that they have constructed through their experiences, as well as the co-constructed social reality they share with each colleague with whom they interact.

This chapter sets out to outline the purpose and objectives of this study and to provide the background information, in order to orientate the reader. The relevance of this particular topic is explained, along with an explanation of the relationship of this topic to the discipline of Communication within the field of Organisational Communication. The conceptualisation of key concepts that form part of the theoretical foundation and literature of this study are explained, in order to promote shared meaning and to enhance clarity and consistency. This culminates with an exploration of the research paradigm, methodology and formulation of the research problem. The chapter concludes with the mapping of the chapters that follow this one and an overview of what is to come.

1.2 Background to the study

As types of interaction behaviour, both informal and interpersonal communication are critical aspects of communication within organisations, because they help improve and nurture strong working relationships in the organisational context, both internally and externally. It is important for co-workers to interact and communicate with one another. Employees should have meaningful and positive interaction behaviour for job development and job satisfaction. Other positive organisational practices that may emerge from prolonged cooperative engagements in the organisational context include trust, as applied to individual organisational relationships between colleagues and towards the development of a trust-based organisational climate and/or culture, friendship, loyalty among colleagues and towards the organisational context, mental wellbeing, constructive teamwork, *etc.* Husain (2013:43) supports these conjectures by explaining that recent studies have shown direct correlations between positive and effective work outputs, such as "… organisational commitment, performance, organisational citizenship behaviours and job satisfaction" being directly associated with effective communication within an organisational context, particularly during periods of change. Bergman, Dellve and Skagert (2016:533–535) explicate that, in order for an organisation to have a positive and effective organisational climate and a healthy and well-adjusted organisation built on trust, effective communication processes are required. Moreover, as observed by Bergman *et al* (2016:533–34), in order for an

organisational culture to be characterised as having open communication, the interaction behaviour between colleagues needs to be unrestricted, truthful, a mutual engagement at all levels to increase shared meaning, minimise conflict and promote a tolerant and respectful ethos. Bergman *et al* (2016:533–534) continue that to achieve a diverse, healthy and positive workplace, open communication is required. In these environments, employees are more likely to become involved, manage upwards and influence the organisational climate and culture. The attributes of open communication climates contextualised by the afore mentioned authors – such as honesty, tolerance, deeper understanding and more meaningful interactions – reflect the impact that open communication climates and/or inclusive cultures in organisations can have on disclosure experiences of gay individuals within the organisational context. Eddy and Rumens (2017:112) concur with Bergman *et al* (2016:533–535), in that inclusive environments and supportive policies that are lived out by those in the organisation and supported by management, lead not only to improved mental wellbeing in the organisation, but also a greater willingness of gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity at work.

From the aforementioned conjectures, it is posited that supportive organisational climates and/or cultures foster not only more effective and meaningful interaction behaviour, but also enhance employee wellbeing and possibly influence work outputs. Positive, effective and open communication in the organisation is critical for a number of organisational outputs, as well as for the establishment of a positive organisational climate and/or culture, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. As theorised in this study and extrapolated in the findings, organisations that nurture open and spontaneous communication, where policies and staff are supportive of minority groups – in this case, gay individuals – and foster an organisational climate and/or culture that is "safe" for individuals to disclose their sexual identity, without fear of prejudice or negative ramifications, are regarded as inclusive and conducive organisational climates and/or cultures for disclosure. Moreover, the concomitant impact of positive engagements on organisational practices include inclusive organisational climates for sharing, employee loyalty, better team cooperation, trust among employees, increased employee wellbeing and more effective communication processes within organisations.

Individuals are known to share personal information within their organisations and, although various studies have been conducted on the appropriate levels of sharing and

the information that should or should not be shared, what is not disputed, is the fact that disclosure of personal information will occur within organisations (Myers 2007:4–5). The disclosure of personal information in the organisation, sensitive information in particular, can have both positive and negative implications for the interaction behaviour among colleagues, as well as impact on the organisational climate and/or culture of a particular organisation. Colleagues may disclose various types of personal information among one another. Some information is more sensitive to disclose and may be perceived as being of higher risk to disclose than other information. For example, disclosing deeply personal information, like the disclosure of being gay, may be considered more high risk than disclosing, for example, the personal information of being pregnant. The disclosure of personal information is also influenced by social norms and the fact that society is predominately based on heteronormative values. In this way, pregnancy, as an example, could be considered more acceptable as a societal norm than being gay.

Eddy and Rumens (2017:110) note that prejudice and discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) individuals is still prevalent in the organisational context and research related to LGBTQ individuals is far more limited than research into other dimensions related to diversity, such as, for example race, disability and gender. These authors explain that there are multiple reasons for the limited research; one of the primary reasons being that sexual identity is something that can usually be avoided and/or concealed, because it is less noticeable then race, gender and disability. Even in cases where it is more noticeable than in others, it is still speculative until the person's sexual identity is revealed. In many countries identifying as LGBTQ is considered a medical and/or psychological condition and, therefore, much of the extant research was medically or psychologically based (Eddy & Rumens 2017:111). However, over the last decade, engaging organisations that are inclusive of LGBTQ employees has intensified.

It should be noted that the term "gay" is used in this study, as opposed to "homosexual", because "homosexuality" is a term with negative connotations because of its use in the description of being gay as a pathological disorder. The term *homosexuality* has also been used by anti-gay extremists, who denote homosexuality as a psychological and/or emotional disorder. Whilst all of these notions were discredited in the 1970s by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, the connotations of the word "homosexuality" are still entrenched. Therefore, the terms "gay"

or “lesbian” are used to describe people attracted to members of the same sex (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation 2016:8). In this study, the term *gay* is used to include both gay men and gay women.

As noted previously, there has been an increase in studies on sensitivity and inclusivity related to gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity in organisations in the last decade. However, despite the vast expanse of literature available on organisational communication, there is little extant research on the impact of disclosure of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour in the organisational context and co-constructed social realities between individuals and their colleagues. Therefore, this study focuses on interaction behaviour and co-constructed social realities and the focus of the theoretical orientation is the social construction of reality, constructivism and symbolic interactionism. Given that this is a perception-based study focused on the uniqueness of each participant’s own experience and interpretation of their reality-altering event and is conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, the notion of what constitutes reality and interaction behaviour is aligned with the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the interpretivist paradigm and the study should be read as such.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence that a reality-altering event may have on interaction behaviour (communication). Within the context of this study, this alteration in communication is referred to as “re-communication”. In order to explore this communication phenomenon, the study focuses on the influence of disclosure on altering the communication between gay individuals and their colleagues after their disclosure of their sexual identity as gay to these colleagues. It is argued that people, and in this case colleagues, co-construct social realities through their interaction behaviour. It is further argued that, because heterosexuality is the norm and the language and meanings ascribed to symbols dominant in society support heteronormativity, people often assume that a colleague is heterosexual and construct their reality based on this notion. Going into an interaction, both the gay individuals and their colleagues will have their own social reality, which they have constructed through their experiences, as well as co-constructed social realities they share with each colleague with whom they interact.

It is purported that gay individuals are often placed in a position in which they use strategic or spontaneous communication to employ communication strategies to avoid disclosure of their sexual identity or to conceal their sexual identity (termed self-preservation communication strategies in this study). Alternatively, their sexual identity is disclosed by others to their colleagues. Moreover, as previously mentioned, unlike other diversity factors, such as race, gender and physical disability, being gay, is usually not aesthetically noticeable. Even in cases where it is more noticeable, it is still speculative, until the person's sexual identity has actually been revealed.

In order to explain this unexplored communication phenomenon, the study also aims at developing a re-communication conceptual framework for it. The study focuses on the way in which strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised in any reality-altering event to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual, who experienced a reality-altering event, or by persons or forms of communication external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure, then, becomes the reality-altering event. Therefore, the re-communication conceptual framework designed in this study, firstly, includes elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure; secondly, self-preservation communication strategies; and thirdly, the framework focuses on the actual reality-altering event, which, in this case, is when a gay individual's sexual identity of being gay is disclosed to colleagues. Lastly, the framework looks at re-communication. Within the context of this study, it is argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague is altered from a position of being unaware of the individual being gay to knowing.

Although the disclosure of sexual identity is selected as the example of a reality-altering event in this study, the dominant themes of the proposed re-communication conceptual framework can be applied to multiple reality-altering events in different contexts. In this way, the proposed re-communication conceptual framework and the communication phenomenon are the contributions of the study.

It should be pointed out that there is a complexity to this study, given the fact that new terms are being coined and a phenomenon is being described that has not been discussed in-depth before. Therefore, this section should be revisited once the entire study has been read and the concepts and arguments have then been clarified.

1.4 Relevance of the topic and other research in the field

Advanced searches were conducted on the following databases, prior to the registration of the title and on registration of the title at proposal stage: Google, Google Scholar, Nexus (NRF), EBSCOHost Open Dissertations, SABINET, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD), SABINET WorldCAT Dissertations and Theses and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. These searches were repeated in May 2019 for the title and topic of this study, as well as the phenomenon of re-communication and the re-communication conceptual framework. None of these yielded any direct results on topics. The absence of research involved in the topic of this research is evidence of the unique nature and relevance of a study and framework of this nature and the impact it may have, nationally and internationally, in terms of providing depth and guidelines into reality-altering events within the organisational context.

With the assistance of a professional librarian, the researcher combined and unpacked some of the broader themes in the study, to ascertain what research has been produced in the following areas of disclosure in the organisational context; disclosure of sexual identity in the organisational context; disclosure of personal information in the organisational context; the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour in organisations; re-communication and re-communication conceptual framework; reality-altering events; and interaction behaviour. In some cases, there are topics related to these broader themes, but the research does not focus on the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour in the organisational context and does not involve reality-altering events or re-communication. As indicated in Table 1.1, the phenomenon of re-communication and the re-communication conceptual framework are also not evident in previous studies.

However, some of the research conducted is of reality-altering events, even though the researchers have not named them as such. For example, the disclosure of an individual's HIV status could be considered a reality-altering event. Authors such as Giritli Nygren, Öhman and Olofsson (2017:418–421) would term research of the nature of this proposed research, including disclosure of sexual identity to colleagues in the organisation, as *risk research.* They explain that, although there has been a diversification in risk research during the last ten years to deepen the understanding of risk in contemporary society, the area that has received little attention is risk in relation to inequality in a sociological

context. In alignment with this study, matters around being gay and disclosure of sexual identity are classified as risk research.

Given the fact that this topic has not been registered – nationally and globally – by anyone other than the researcher and given that this research is conducted in the South African organisational context, it is positioned as a unique contribution. Table 1.1 outlines research on similarly aligned topics, yielded from the Nexus Database (National Research Foundation of South Africa) and the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD). Although some of the titles are focused on disclosure of sexual identity in organisations, it should be noted that this study deals with the disclosure of reality-altering events and the context to which it is applied in this case sexual identity. None of the studies listed in Table 1.1 focus on the disclosure of sexual identity as a reality-altering event on the interaction behaviour in the organisational context. Those studies that do focus on sexual identity mostly deal with discrimination.

Table 1.1: Similar local research

Title	Author	Type of study	Date	Higher education institution	Focus
Racial harassment and discrimination in the workplace	C. Sibiya	Research paper: LLB	2017	University of Pretoria	The problem of racial harassment and discrimination in the workplace
The experiences of employees living with HIV regarding the Swedish Workplace HIV and AIDS Programme	MM. Kau	Mini-dissertation: Master of Social Work in Healthcare	2017	University of Pretoria	The experiences of a Swedish company's employees living with HIV and AIDS
The role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in a non-governmental	FM. Omayo	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Communication Science	2016	UNISA	The role of interpersonal communication in managing peer co-worker conflict in a Non-

Title	Author	Type of study	Date	Higher education institution	Focus
organisation : a case study of SILC Kenya, Eldoret					Governmental organisation
The impact of HIV/AIDS programmes at the workplace: a case study at United Refineries (PVT) Ltd Bulawayo, Zimbabwe	M. Ncube	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Public Health	2015	UNISA	The impact of HIV/AIDS programmes at the workplace
Struggles of authenticity : "gays and lesbians" experiences of being closeted in the workplace during transition to constitutional equality in South Africa	C. Hattingh	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Psychology	2014	University of Cape Town	The experiential world of gays and lesbians who keep their sexual orientation secret from colleagues and superiors in the workplace
Analysis of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace	TS. Maloko	Dissertation: aster of Law in Labour Law	2013	University of Limpopo	Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace
The needs and barriers as experienced by employees with physical disabilities in the workplace	ML. Mathaphuna	Dissertation: Master of Social Work	2013	University of Pretoria	The barriers and needs as experienced by employees with physical disabilities in the workplace

Title	Author	Type of study	Date	Higher education institution	Focus
Homophobia: experiences and perceptions of the LGBT community of police in the Durban Metropolitan Area	NJ. Mahapa	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Gender Studies	2013	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal	How fundamentalist moralist Christian notions of sexuality perpetuate violent anti-LGBT rhetoric within law enforcement structures and other institutions in Durban
HIV disclosure in the workplace amongst public service workers in Zambia	RM. Musumali	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Public Health	2012	University of the Western Cape	Identifying and describing the HIV-disclosure experiences of openly HIV-positive Zambian public sector workers living in Lusaka and working in four Zambian Ministries
Descriptive study of discrimination and bullying in the workplace	DJ. Kalamdien	Dissertation: Master of Commerce	2012	University of Stellenbosch	Bullying in the workplace and how to overcome it
An analysis of the sexual orientation discrimination framework in the public sector: the case of Stellenbosch Municipality	T. Opperman	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Public and Development Management	2010	University of Stellenbosch	Sexual orientation (discrimination) as a part of diversity management in organisations

Title	Author	Type of study	Date	Higher education institution	Focus
Being gay in the management echelon of the South African Department of Defence: a life history	BL. Tlou	Thesis: Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership in Performance and Change	2007	University of Johannesburg	Leadership behaviour among gays in the management echelon of the South African Department of Defence
Peering from the closet at a liberated society: a phenomenological case study of gays and lesbians in the workplace	ALC Hattingh	Dissertation: Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology	1998	University of Cape Town	It states that there are no files associated with this record and thus the focus cannot be ascertained

Furthermore, although there are several theories related to the social construction of reality, interaction behaviour, disclosure and social cognition, these theories do not provide an in-depth insight into the influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour. Therefore, this study is relevant, in that it provides insight into the communication phenomenon of re-communication, as well as the following aspects of the development of the re-communication conceptual framework: (i) elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure (the disclosure is the reality-altering event); (ii) self-preservation communication strategies used by gay individuals to preserve themselves by avoiding or concealing the reality-altering event; (iii) the reality-altering event, which, in this case, is the disclosure of sexual identity of gay individuals to colleagues; and (iv) re-communication. Re-communication involves the fact that, regardless of how the disclosure resulting in the reality-altering event occurs, there is a perceived alteration in communication post-disclosure between the gay individuals and their colleagues. It is also acknowledged that the co-constructed social reality between each colleague and each gay individual is altered from a position of being unaware (that the individual is gay) to one of awareness. More importantly, there is currently no existing literature that describes the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour or the phenomenon of re-communication, which is provided by this study. It is purported

that, although the elements and communication used in disclosure – such as communication disclosure strategies and spontaneous communication – may differ from reality-altering event to reality-altering event, the re-communication conceptual framework that has been developed in this study can be applied to other reality-altering events.

The study may also contribute to aiding individuals experiencing reality-altering events to understand and navigate the communication utilised in reality-altering events, and the potential resultant influence on their interaction behaviour with those with whom they share their sexual identity and/or another reality-altering event. It is posited that a reality-altering event can be deeply personal, e.g. being diagnosed with a terminal illness, and influence people on an individual level to come to terms with being gay, getting divorced, accepting the death of a loved one, being sexually abused, being raped, *etc.*

The individual will first be informed of or become aware of the reality-altering event. The example of a person being diagnosed with a terminal illness will be used as an example, although this could be applicable to a number of other reality-altering events, including, as in this study, gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues in the organisation. For example, if an individual finds out s/he has a terminal illness, the individual will experience this reality-altering event in isolation, until it is disclosed to someone else. As soon as an individual and/or someone else discloses the information about the person, e.g. if the terminally ill individual tells someone s/he has cancer or a colleague tells another colleague this individual has cancer, then this disclosure is considered a secondary reality-altering event. The reality-altering event of disclosure, which is the focus of this study, influences the communication between the individual and those who have come to know about the fact that this individual has a terminal illness. Moreover, the co-constructed social reality between the individual disclosing and those s/he discloses to will be altered from a position of not knowing about the individual having cancer to knowing that the individual has cancer and is terminally ill. This influence on communication and learning to communicate again in an altered co-constructed social reality (in this case people now knowing the individual has cancer) is the phenomenon being identified, explained and labelled in this study – i.e. re-communication.

This study contributes to the discipline of Communication within the field of Organisational Communication, in that it identifies, explains and labels a previously unexplored communication phenomenon. It also provides thick descriptions to create an in-depth understanding of the afore-mentioned aspects of the re-communication conceptual framework.

This study also has the potential of providing insight into creating more inclusive organisational climates and/or cultures that are considered as constructive and more conducive to open and effective informal and interpersonal communication within the organisational context. As was already established, inclusive organisational climates and/or cultures and prolonged cooperative engagements are considered as fostering better work environments. These working environments promote honesty, trust, tolerance and improved mental wellbeing in the organisation, as well as a potentially greater willingness of gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity in their organisational contexts (Bergman *et al* 2016:533–535; Eddy & Rumens 2017:112).

Those who may benefit from drawing on the insights provided in this study in their professional practises include, but are not limited to, specialists in Psychology and/or Organisational Psychology, councillors, communication practitioners and/or human resource practitioners. The insights provided in this study may assist these professions when dealing with individuals experiencing fear or anxiety related to reality-altering events; fear of interacting about their reality-altering events; or are trying to improve internal communication in their or other organisations; strengthen the development of the relationship between colleagues and nurture more inclusive and supportive organisational climates and/or cultures and all the benefits that flow from that within the organisation. If individuals can be more open, spontaneous and truthful in their communication with others, they do not feel they have to sensor and monitor what they say and, therefore, the communication becomes more spontaneous, less thought out, and more open. If the communication in an interaction between the gay individuals and their colleagues has to remain strategic, it may put strain on a relationship, because if they are constantly monitoring their communication, people cannot be themselves. This may result in psychological stress. With the benefit of having established this knowledge and insights into the discipline of Communication, it becomes imperative to explain the relationship of the topic to the discipline of Communication in greater depth.

1.5 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of communication

As previously indicated, the primary relationship to the discipline of Communication, is that of identifying, explaining and labelling a previously unexplored communication phenomenon and developing a re-communication conceptual framework, thereby making an original academic contribution to the discipline of Communication as applied to the organisational context. In order to explore the communication phenomenon of re-communication, the study focuses on the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour within the organisational context. In this way, the primary field within the discipline of Communication is Organisational Communication and, within that context, informal and interpersonal organisational communication specifically.

In the process of deciding if and how to disclose, avoiding disclosure or concealing their sexual identity as gay, or prior to other people disclosing the gay individual's sexual identity, the gay individual engages in intrapersonal communication. Concurrently to the intrapersonal communication, it is considered that some gay individuals may use self-preservation communication strategies in their interpersonal interactions with colleagues to avoid disclosure. Moreover, during the reality-altering event (the actual disclosure), gay individuals may utilise various forms of communication, some of which include interpersonal communication disclosure strategies and spontaneous communication.

When an external party discloses the gay individual's sexual identity to others, either intentionally or unintentionally, the disclosure may be out of the gay individual's control. Interpersonal communication is also evident post-disclosure in the re-communication process, when the communication between the gay individuals and the colleagues to whom they disclose, is altered. Firstly, the colleague transitions from a position of not knowing an individual is gay to knowing. Secondly, the communication style changes – from more strategic and guarded communication in which the gay individual has been likely more cautious, less open and more strategic (always thinking and monitoring what s/he was saying) to a more open communication style. This alteration in communication is the proposed communication phenomenon of re-communication, and, while the gay individuals may now be more open with the colleagues to whom they have disclosed, it should be noted that it is proposed that re-communication can be positive, negative or neutral. It is further proposed that the alteration in interpersonal communication between the gay individuals and their colleagues, in turn, alters the co-constructed social reality

existing between the gay individuals and each of their colleagues. It should be taken into account that the reality-altering event of disclosure of personal information and the resultant re-communication are considered transactional processes of communication and, thereby linking to the discipline of Communication Science.

It should be considered that the proposed self-preservation communication strategies, the communication disclosure strategies and spontaneous communication utilised in the disclosure of a gay individual's reality are merely one dimension of internal communication related to organisational communication and only one dimension of interpersonal communication. Therefore, it should be made clear that not all aspects of these fields of Communication are explored within the study.

Given the purpose of this study – i.e. to explore the influence of reality-altering events on communication and the subsequent impact of the co-constructed social reality on the interaction between individuals, coupled with the perceived meaning that gay individuals ascribe to the disclosure experience – symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism are considered the most appropriate theories to present a sound and relevant theoretical underpinning to this study. Although theories of interpersonal communication, organisational communication, organisational culture and climate, perception theories, social exchange theories and theories of relational development were considered, these theories did not form part of the theoretical foundation. Nevertheless, the literature review does touch on aspects of these theories, where relevant to this study.

1.6 Conceptualisation of key concepts

In order to promote shared meaning and to enhance clarity and consistency, the key concepts that form part of this study need to be conceptualised. The concepts that form the foundation of this study are disclosure, co-constructed social reality, reality-altering event, interaction behaviour, sexual identity, communication strategies in the interpersonal context, re-communication, organisational context and organisational communication.

1.6.1 Disclosure

In the context of this study, disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity in organisations is considered a reality-altering event, which is explained in greater depth in the literature

review (Chapter 3). The application of disclosure is explored by means of the social penetration theory in the same chapter. However, because disclosure is a key concept in this research, it should be contextualised.

As part of an interpersonal process, disclosure is a form of communication. When it is both personal and meaningful, then disclosure plays a critical part in relationship development, particularly when it is reciprocated, thereby becoming a mutual exchange. Disclosure is a two-way communication process of sharing information that is not known to others, in a voluntary and willing way. Disclosure does put the individual in a vulnerable state of being with those to whom they disclose, as the information is often of a personal nature. Disclosure is a unique experience for each individual and each individual ascribes his/her own meaning to disclosure. Therefore, individuals consider the costs and benefits of disclosing before they do so, in any context, including an organisational context. However, as individualistic as the interpretation of the experience may be, social scientists regard disclosure as a social exchange process (Barak & Gluck-Ofri 2007:407–408; Cheung, Lee & Chan 2015:279–282; Cho 2007:339; Detenber, Wijaya & Goh 2008; Dietz-Uhler, Bishop-Clark & Howard 2005:115; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:238; Lee, Joh & Koo 2013:414; Tardy & Dindia 2018:229; Zang & Huang 2012).

It should be taken into account that there are varying ways of defining disclosure, but this way of perceiving disclosure is used for this study. However, disclosure, as referred to above, is the disclosure of the gay individual by choice to his/her colleagues either by using communication disclosure strategies or via spontaneous communication. Nonetheless, disclosure may occur external to the gay individual and out of his/her control, because a colleague may disclose the gay individual's sexual identity, intentionally or unintentionally, to other colleagues in the organisation.

1.6.2 Co-constructed social reality

It is recognised that reality can be defined in multiple ways, such as a physical reality (which some may term an objective reality) or a socially constructed reality. Depending on the paradigm from which reality is positioned, it may also have different meanings. In the context of this study, reality is framed from an interpretivist ontological position and is theoretically laid out in relation to social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. Therefore – unlike the quantitative approaches that view social reality as an objective reality – in this study, social reality is considered subjective and socially constructed and it cannot be separated from interpretation and perceptions. For the purpose of this study,

reality is viewed through the lens of the originators of social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann (1966:13), who state, “reality is socially constructed and the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs.” This approach to reality is explored in Chapter 2.

Therefore, in this context, social reality does not exist outside of what an individual perceives as his/her socially constructed reality. In other words, there is not one true social reality or a definitive social reality, but rather that socially constructed reality is developed based on an individual’s own interpretations, experiences and perceptions of what his/her social reality is. Social reality is co-constructed through daily social interactions that influence the interaction behaviour between individuals.

In the case of this study, social reality not only involves an individual’s socially constructed reality, but also the co-constructed social reality existing between gay individuals and their colleagues. A co-constructed social reality differs from individual relationship to individual relationship. The meaning and perceptions derived from these day-to-day interactions arise out of the interactive human community with which individuals engage. Therefore, if human beings are social beings, the self and all forms of an individual’s identity and social reality are created through interactions with others. This means that aspects of an individual’s life are socially constructed according to the individual’s perception of his/her social reality and his/her co-constructed social reality with others on an individual basis. Moreover, as indicated previously, socially constructed reality also includes the way in which individuals co-construct a social reality with each colleague with whom they interact in their organisational context (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009; Beaumie 2012; Berger & Luckmann 1966: 13, 33–34; Cromby & Nightingale 1999; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:56–57; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:22; Sankarasubramanyan & Joshi 2013:17).

1.6.3 Reality-altering event

Within the context of this study, a reality-altering event is an inventive concept and, consequently, there is no relevant literature that can be used to define the concept. To address the gap in the literature and for the purposes of this study, a reality-altering event is defined as any event that may influence an individual’s social reality. It is posited that a reality-altering event can be deeply personal and influences the person on an individual level, such as, among other things, being diagnosed with a terminal illness, coming to terms with being gay, getting divorced, death of a loved one, being sexually abused or

raped, *etc.* Sometimes an event occurs in an unexpected way, e.g. the death of a loved one, or being raped. This alters an individual's reality immediately and occurs at a single point in time – it is immediate. Other reality-altering events are continuous in nature and involve prolonged events, thereby continually changing co-constructed social realities, e.g. an individual realising that s/he is gay and the possible alteration that may cause in relationships with those around the gay individual. Even if an individual knows that s/he is gay from a young age, s/he still has to come to terms with this over time. However, it is important to note that, during these initial stages of a reality-altering event, the reality of it and the communication about it occur at an intrapersonal level, because, until the individual decides to disclose this reality-altering event to another individual, it is his/hers alone. As soon as an individual discloses his/her reality-altering event, it becomes another reality-altering event – that of disclosure – because, as disclosure takes place, the co-constructed social reality between the individual disclosing and those to whom s/he discloses, is altered through the interaction of transitioning from a position of not knowing to now knowing about this individual's reality-altering event. It is important to remember that social reality is altered through social interaction, which, in turn, may influence the interaction behaviour between the individual experiencing the reality-altering event and those to whom s/he disclose, thereby influencing the communication.

In the context of this study, the secondary reality-altering event of disclosure is the focus, in particular when gay individuals (all the participants in this study identify themselves as being gay) disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts.

1.6.4 Interaction behaviour

In this study, interaction behaviour is the overarching concept that is used to describe the interaction between the participants and their colleagues during the communication stage of self-preservation of their sexual identity, the reality-altering event (disclosure) and re-communication. In other words, in this context, the term "interaction behaviour" refers to communication. The term "interaction behaviour" was selected because of its link to symbolic interactionism and the importance of the term "interaction" in symbolic interaction.

For the purpose of this study, interaction is defined in alignment with symbolic interactionism. Interaction plays a critical role in the concept of self and an individual's perception of the world. In their primary socialisation or formative years, individuals' utilise and witness various forms of interaction behaviour of which they are required to

make sense. In these formative years, interaction behaviour is guided by those with whom they interact and socialise and this will influence the construction of their social reality later in life. Prolonged engagements with others lead to experiences and may further influence perspectives and worldviews, based on who is leading the interactions. Communication is critical to interaction, because people are socialised through their interaction with the individuals with whom they engage in society. Individuals make meaning and sense through social interaction and communication is the vehicle used to process their negotiation of the world and an important aspect of the construction of self is based on the interactions people have with others (Carter & Fuller 2015; Gabatz, Schwartz, Milbrath, Zillmer & Neves 2017; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:99–100). "We do not work out the meaning of social objects, attitudes and plans of action in isolation. Indeed, the whole premise in symbolic interactionism is that these things arise from interaction with others" (Littlejohn & Foss 2011:100).

According the *Oxford Dictionary* (2019), *behaviour* refers to the "… way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others. The way in which … a person behaves in response to a particular situation or stimulus." In the context of symbolic interactionism, behaviour has observable and unobservable aspects and behaviour is influenced by communication between at least two participants, which is an act of socialisation, which Mead calls "the social act" (Mead 1934:6–7).

Therefore, *interaction behaviour* is defined in this study as any form of communication that an individual undertakes in relation to and with other individuals in his/her organisational context and the meaning these individuals ascribe to things, attitudes, social objects that may influence this communication process or may be shared and created in the process.

1.6.5 Sexual identity

In the context of this study, sexual identity specifically refers to individuals who classify themselves as gay.

Sexual identity is complex and should not be confused with sexual orientation. Similar to other social identities, sexual identity is made up of varied continuums and socialisation of ongoing relationships. The three most pivotal to sexual identity are: (i) gender identity; (ii) sexual orientation; and (iii) romantic orientation. Although all of these are individual aspects, they form a combined part of an individual's sexual identity. Gender identity, on

the other hand, involves the meaning that individuals' ascribe to their experiences to the gender with whom they identify. Although most people identify with the gender they are given at birth, this is not always the case.

Sexual orientation is based on whom an individual is sexually, emotionally and romantically attracted to within a given context. Romantic orientation is the actual desire to co-construct a romantic connection. Sexual identity is individuals' self-recognition of their sexual orientation and sexual behaviour and the meaning that an individual ascribes to sexual orientation and behaviour. Sexual identity, therefore, refers to an individual's self-recognition of his/her sexual orientation and sexual behaviour and the meaning s/he ascribes to sexual orientation and behaviour (Anderson, Taylor & Logio 2014:282, 284; Sutherland, Roberts, Gabriel, Struwig & Gordon 2016:11; Tatum 2018:618).

Sexual orientation is, however, not the same as sexual identity. This distinction is best explained with an example. A woman may have regular sexual relations with women, because her sexual orientation is one of being attracted to the same sex, but she may not identify herself as being a gay individual and, therefore, she will not have a sexual identity of being gay. Although this woman may have a sexual orientation towards women, it is only if the woman identifies herself as being gay that her sexual identity would be gay. Not identifying herself with her sexual orientation may stem from varying reasons, such as fear, denial, choice, *etc.* The concealment, avoidance and/or disclosure of an individual's sexual identity to others is termed *sexual identity management* (Anderson *et al* 2014:282, 284; Sutherland *et al* 2016:11; Tatum 2018:618; University of Texas Dallas 2019).

Therefore, when referring to gay individuals' sexual orientation in this study, the term that will be used will be "sexual identity", because the participants are not ambivalent about their sexual identity – they all identify themselves as being gay, in order to be included in this study. As indicated, some individuals have a sexual orientation towards the same sex and sexual relationships, but they do not consider themselves as gay and, therefore, their sexual identity is not definitive to them and that is why they would not be included in this study. (Please note that this does not refer to bisexual individuals, but rather to people, who are ambiguous about or still questioning their sexual identity).

1.6.6 Communication strategies in the interpersonal context

In the interpersonal context, strategic communication is often framed in relation to its counterpart, which is spontaneous communication that is authentic and open. Strategic communication in the interpersonal context is contrived, premeditated, calculated, forced and unspontaneous and usually planned and meditated and, in extreme cases, even has elements of deception built into the communication. Therefore, strategic communication is a deliberate, purposeful and carefully planned way of communicating that is often explained as communication with a specific agenda and it usually entails a very specific motive (Duarte Melo, Balonas, Ruao, Felicio 2016:41; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2009: 226–227; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014: 238; Wood 2006:228).

In this study, it is argued that gay individuals are often placed in a position where they choose to self-preserve by avoiding disclosure of their sexual identity or even concealing it to colleagues within their organisational contexts. Alternatively, they may choose to disclose their sexual identity and, when they do, they use different forms of communication to do so, such as communication strategies and/or spontaneous communication. The aim of this study is to provide in-depth insight in and thick descriptions of the communication strategies that gay individuals use to avoid or conceal their sexual identity (referred to as self-preservation communication strategies) from colleagues in their organisational contexts, as well as the communication strategies (referred to as communication disclosure strategies) and/or spontaneous communication they use to disclose their sexual identity (referred to as the reality-altering event). Therefore, the strategic communication in the context of the engagements in this study are the deliberate, planned and calculated way in which gay individuals communicate to colleagues when they are trying to avoid disclosure of their sexual identity or conceal their sexual identity, as well as during the actual disclosure of their sexual identity.

It is posited that strategic communication is used, because they are always considering the primary goal and possible consequences of disclosure. The gay individuals do not plan spontaneous communication leading to disclosure; it is based on circumstances or a moment in time that leads to the disclosure. For example, a gay individual does not intend disclosing his/her sexual identity and then s/he is in a group of colleagues at work and someone is defaming gay individuals and the gay individual decides to speak up against this defamatory behaviour by stating that s/he is, in fact gay, and that the interaction is insulting.

1.6.7 Re-communication

Re-communication is a phenomenon that is being identified, explained and labelled in this study and, consequently, there is no relevant research and literature that can be used to define the concept. Because re-communication is a novel concept and has no benchmarked definition, communication will first be defined, because it forms the basis of re-communication and then re-communication will be defined in relation to communication.

Communication can be defined as a dynamic, transactional process that is mutually interactive, involving the sending and receiving of messages and that involves encoding and decoding of what is being transmitted for multiple purposes within dyads, groups or larger social structures. The ultimate purpose of communication is to share information and establish shared meaning between the communicators (*Chapter 1. An orientation to organisational communication* [2007]; Beattie & Ellis 2017:3; Cobley & Schulz 2013:1; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2009:5; Jensen 2018:26; Steinberg 2007:39–30; Wood 2004:9).

Within the discipline of Communication Science, there are varied fields, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group or mass communication. Within the framing of the term re-communication, interpersonal communication plays a dominant role in this study. Interpersonal communication is the transaction and interaction of information, ideas, feelings and meaning between two or more individuals that transpires through language and discourse. Interpersonal communication is also a symbolic process that seeks to understand the communication cues to achieve both personal and relational goals. One of the purposes of interpersonal communication is the transfer of messages between communicators, with the purpose of creating a shared social reality and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal communication includes social interactions that are created and interpreted between people, in order to create shared meaning. It should be considered that interpersonal communication makes up most of the day-to-day activities and interactions of which individuals form a part and individuals are influenced by the opinions and actions of those around them (Bresnahan & Zhu 2017:199–201; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2009:5–8; Flanagin 2017:450, 453; Jensen 2018:26; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:147; Steinberg 2007:140–141; Tubbs & Moss 2008:19; Wood 2004:9).

Because re-communication is a form of communication, it can be defined as a dynamic, transactional process anticipated occurring at an interpersonal level. The prefix “re” denotes the meaning of “occurring again”, or “doing something again”. It is theorised that, when gay individuals disclose their sexual identity to colleagues, their interaction behaviour may be influenced and altered by the reality-altering event with the colleague to whom they have disclosed at a given time. In turn, their co-constructed social reality with each of the colleagues to whom they disclose will be altered – from a position of not knowing to knowing the individual is gay. In this way, the gay individual and the colleague will “learn to communicate again” in an altered social reality and they will reconstruct their co-constructed social reality to include this information, and their interaction behaviour will now include details of this personal information and their communication will likely be altered. Re-communication is envisioned to occur differently with each colleague to whom the gay individuals disclose, because it is a unique experience based on their specific interaction behaviour and experiences.

Therefore, in this context, re-communication should be understood as a transactional process, which is an interactive exchange and interpretation of information with the purpose of establishing a shared understanding.

1.6.8 Organisational context and organisational communication

Oludeyi (2015:32) explains that, in its most base form, a work environment includes the physical setting, situation, factors and circumstances affecting the way people work. Moreover, work environments are systemic, in that they include the sum of the parts and the interrelationship between all elements in the system that makes up the whole. This is the interrelationship between employees and the employer as well as between employees themselves. The work environment includes the technical, the human and the organisational environment (Oludeyi 2015:32). To this end, in the context of this study, the organisational context will refer to the physical organisation in which the gay individual is employed and the group of human beings with whom the gay individual interacts, in order to complete work-related tasks – i.e. his/her colleagues.

It is noted that there are varying definitions, trends in and perspectives of organisational communication and that each is underpinned by a vast array of organisational communication theories from varied traditions that could have been used for the purpose of this study; such as the Classical Approaches, Human Resource Approaches, Human Relations Approaches, Systems Approaches, Cultural Approaches and Critical

Approaches. There is also a number of processes that could have been utilised, such as the socialisation processes, decision-making processes, conflict management processes, leadership processes and organisational change processes. It is neither possible nor purposeful to explore each of these for the scope of this study, which primarily deals with the interaction behaviour of an individual at the interpersonal level of communication within the organisational context and the self-preserving communication strategies or communication disclosure strategies and/or spontaneous communication used in an organisational context.

Communication within an organisation involves the flow of all information, all brand assets, coupled with the perceptions and understanding of individuals working in the organisation. All organisations require individuals to interact and all administrative, operational and managerial functions use both direct and indirect forms of communication. Different forms of communication are also the strategies and tools that employees use in their official and unofficial communication. However, in the context of this study, the focus of organisational communication is not on these aspects of organisational communication, but rather on the informal interaction behaviour between employees in organisations. There are two different channels of communication within the organisational context: formal and informal communication (Cacciattolo 2015:83; Markovic & Salamzadeh 2018:22; Nwogbaga, Nwankwo & Onwa 2015; Singh 2014:36).

Therefore, in this study, the purpose of organisational communication is to explore the possible influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour in the organisational context, with the reality-altering event being the disclosure of sexual identity. Organisational communication will be defined similarly to communication in this study and that is the exchanging of communication cues, information and ideas within an organisation. Organisational communication is critical for maintaining and improving organisational relationships and communication within the organisational context and it is critical in promoting the wellbeing of employees within an organisation (Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang 2014:208; Newman & Goode 2019:19). It is recognised that organisational communication is a broader concept that includes formal and informal communication, but for the purposes of this study, only the relevant aspects of informal and interpersonal communication, related to the purpose and findings, as well as organisational climate and culture, will be utilised.

Now that the key concepts have been conceptualised, the type of study is explained.

1.7 Research paradigm: Interpretivism

In this section, the research paradigm and design in which the study is embedded is discussed.

1.7.1. Paradigmatic positions of Interpretivism

Given that this is a communication study, it is important to note that the positivist tradition has dominated communication research and, although more qualitative approaches have gained significance, debates still rage about the differentiation between the objectively based quantitative research approach and the more subjectively inclined qualitative research approaches. However, there has been a move towards a more hybrid approach – a combination of the qualitative and quantitative approaches, based on the way in which they can complement each other. Yet, a potential problem may still arise when the criteria for positivist research are used to evaluate the holistic merit, reliability and validity of purely qualitative studies. It is for this reason that the researcher feels it is necessary to explicate the research paradigm from within which this study is conducted (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:19; Open University 2019).

In order to provide consistency and clarity from this point on, the term “interpretivism” will be used when referring to the subjective qualitative approach. Moreover, the researcher has adopted the interpretivist paradigm as the framework for this study and, therefore, the entire study is conducted from within this tradition.

Interpretivism was selected, because it is based on an individual’s subjective experiences and perspectives, in this case, the participants’ perceptions of the perceived influence of the reality-altering event of disclosure of a sexual identity on their interaction behaviour with colleagues. Since this study is conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, the notion of what constitutes socially constructed reality and interaction behaviour will be aligned with the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the interpretivist paradigm and the thesis should be read as such.

Interpretivist epistemology focuses on the meaning making that individuals ascribe to their social encounters and interaction behaviour. The ontological perspective of interpretivists is cognitive or mentalist, which means knowledge is viewed as a

transactional process in which reality is socially constructed and negotiated through individuals' own meaning making. Knowledge has to be interpreted within a particular context and there is not one individual knowledge, but rather multiple forms of knowledge (Dean 2018:3; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:20; Open University 2019).

Berger and Luckmann (1966:35), recognise that the world consists of multiple realities. Social reality is formed through the interaction behaviour between people, which directly aligns with the interpretivist epistemological and ontological positions. In the context of this study, it is posited that reality is socially constructed and is individualistic in nature. Individuals can operate within multiple co-constructed social realities with various colleagues, depending on the, in this case, gay individuals' experiences and perceptions both with the colleagues to whom they are not disclosing, as well as their own experiences and perceptions of disclosure of their sexual identity within the organisational context and at a given time. Reality is formed through the interaction behaviour between people, which directly aligns with the interpretivist epistemological and ontological positions.

1.7.2 Interpretivism: epistemological and ontological positions

"Ontological beliefs (theories of the nature of being or existence) and epistemological beliefs (theories of knowledge) underpin the development and use of strategies and methods by empirical researchers" (Scott 2016:243). For the purpose of this study, epistemology and ontology within the interpretivist paradigm are explored.

Epistemology finds its root in the Greek word "episteme", meaning knowledge and epistemology is just that: the study of knowledge, the reasoning of how individuals know what they do about the world and what they claim to know (Antwi & Hamza 2015:219; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:19–20; Gibson 2016:55; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:16–18; Marsh, Ercan & Furlong 2018:178; Scott 2016:243). Marsh *et al* (2018:178) identify two key epistemology-related questions that researchers should ask: firstly, "Can an observer identify real or objective relations between social phenomena?" and, secondly, "if so, how?"

Ontology, on the other hand, is derived from the Greek word for existence and it involves the theory of "being". Ontology and epistemology go hand-in-hand, because individuals' ideas of knowledge itself depends on who claims to do the knowing and that is what ontology is – the nature of being and/or existence within the research context usually

considering the way reality is interpreted within a paradigm. In the discipline of Communication, ontology emphases human social interaction, because the conceptualisation of an interaction largely depends on how a communicator is viewed by a given theorist (Antwi & Hamza 2015: 218; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:19–20; Kelly, Dowling & Miller 2018:9–10; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:16–18; Mouton 2009:46; Scott 2016:243). Marsh *et al* (2018:178) state that "… if an ontological position reflects the researcher's view about the nature of the world, her epistemological position reflects her view of what we can know about the world".

This study is conducted from within an interpretivist paradigm, because the purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular communication phenomenon. The interpretivist perspective is in direct opposition of the positivistic epistemology, which considers that there is a singular objective reality. As a result, interpretivists do not ascribe to the notion of the goal of research being to discover generalisable rules and causal relationships that govern an objective reality and that can be used to predict and control human behaviour. Instead, interpretivism is related to the ideas of Max Weber (1864–1920) whose key philosophy is that the human sciences cannot focus on explanations, but should rather be focused on what Weber termed *verstehen*, which is the German word for "understand". For interpretivists then, the goal of research is to understand the meaning of social phenomena. For interpretivists, the social world is constructed (made) and not discovered (found) and accordingly, reality is seen as a human construction. The paradigm is underpinned by the observation and interpretation of information and creating meaning of this information (*Chapter 1. An orientation to organisational communication* [2007]; Antwi & Hamza 2015:218; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:21; Hughes 2012; Kelly *et al* 2018:9–10; Kroeze 2012, Schwandt, 1998:221–223).

Since interpretivists view knowledge as socially constructed, they do not believe knowledge can be discovered. Knowledge is not seen as something objective but negotiated and also socially constructed. For interpretivists, the goal of knowledge is not to predict and control, but rather to create in-depth understanding. To this end, it is assumed that individuals construct and co-construct their identity and social reality through social interactions. In this study, social interactions involves the gay individuals' interactions with colleagues and *vice versa* during the self-preservation communication strategies, the use of communication disclosure strategies and/or spontaneous

communication of the reality-altering event, as well as the influence of the non-disclosure and/or disclosure of their sexual identity on interaction behaviour (Littlejohn & Foss 2008:34, 37, 43–44; Mouton 2009:189–192; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2007:191–192).

Given the purpose of the study (as stated in the previous paragraph), in-depth interviews and narrative discourse were used. Given that this is an interpretative study, the results are not generalisable, because the study is context specific and based on perceptions. As indicated previously, the intention is to identify and provide thick descriptions of the elements that may influence disclosure or non-disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity, the communication strategies used before disclosure, the communication disclosure strategies and/or spontaneous communication used in the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity and the influence of the disclosure on interaction behaviour post- disclosure. Each individual will perceive the disclosure experience differently, but the outcome of the study can provide guidelines for other gay individuals having similar experiences.

According to interpretivists, researchers' observations are not reality, but rather interpreted reality and an understanding of social and psychological phenomena from the viewpoint of the participant. Interpretivist studies deal with a participant's individual and his/her unique experience of a particular phenomenon. In this study, it deals with the unique and individual experience of each gay individual in disclosing his/her sexual identity as gay to colleagues in his/her organisational context and the phenomenon of re-communication (Littlejohn & Foss 2008:34, 37, 43–44; Mouton 2009:189–192; Welman *et al* 2007:191–192).

Since interpretivists believe knowledge is socially constructed, they do not believe knowledge can be discovered. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:20), "interpretivists believe that what people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed – or made up – as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings." To this end, it is acknowledged that individuals construct their own social reality. Therefore, in the context of this study, reality is based on the way in which the researcher has interpreted the gay individuals' portrayal of their reality disclosure experiences and the influences of their disclosure or non-disclosure experiences.

Because interpretivist studies focus on individual experiences and since individual interpretation and understanding based on context are core aspects of this paradigm, interpretivists use qualitative research methods to gain in-depth understanding of phenomena and they tend to use smaller samples. Based on the subjective nature of interpretivist research, it makes interpretivist studies well suited for issues related to personal experiences and participants' interpretations of a given situation in a given context. This (interpretivist) study is based on the personal disclosure experiences of the participants in the organisational context as interpreted by the researcher (Addo 2018:2065; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:24). Given the interpretivist approach of this study, it is noted that, in alignment with this paradigm, there is no such thing as objective social knowledge and this holds true for what the researcher produces and presents as knowledge.

1.7.3 Method of inquiry: humanistic scholarship

Littlejohn and Foss (2011:9) define *inquiry* as, "… the systematic study of experience that leads to understanding, knowledge and theory. People engage in inquiry when they attempt to find out about something in an orderly way". There are three broad methods of inquiry: scientific scholarship, humanistic scholarship and social scientific research (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:19; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:10–11).

This study falls within the method of humanistic scholarship. In contrast to humanistic scholarship, scientific scholarship places great emphasis on objectivity, where standardisation of observations is pivotal. Scientific inquiry emphasises the generalisation of results, whereas humanists focus on individual cases, not attempting to generalise their results because of their belief that reality is a social construction that differs from individual-to-individual. Since individuals and their subjective experiences are the unit of analysis for this study, this study aligns well with humanistic scholarship. Humanists' aim of understanding individual subjective responses means that they are interested in the way in which individuals construct varied realities, unlike scientists who prefer theories and findings that can be generalised (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:19; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:7–9). The latter aim of humanists' understanding of how individuals construct varied socially constructed realities is also one of the aims of this study and aligns with social constructionism, which forms a significant part of the theoretical foundation.

Humanistic scholarship, which is based on subjective interpretations, understands individuals from a holistic perspective. Humanistic scholars purport that individuals will only be understood in the unique context of their own existence. Individuals are self-aware and they make their own choices, with the aim of achieving their own unique meaning and values. Humanistic scholars are interested in how human beings interpret the world. The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of gay individuals' perception of how and if the disclosure of their sexual identity influences their interaction behaviour and alters their co-constructed social reality with colleagues in their organisational contexts (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:19; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:10–11). In this way, there is a direct alignment between this study and humanistic scholarship.

Subjectivity in research is important when studies deal with individual experiences and perceptions, because, if an in-depth reflection of a specific account is to be given, it will need to include the viewpoints, experiences, feelings and interpretations of the people experiencing a situation and will, therefore, have elements of subjectivity (Open University 2019). In this study, it is argued that gay individuals' subjective experiences will influence the self-preservation communication strategies, the communication disclosure strategies and/or spontaneous communication they opt to use to either disclose or not disclose their sexual identity in their organisational contexts and the possible influence disclosure has on interaction behaviour between the gay individual and his/her colleagues.

Now that the research paradigm has been discussed, the research design is examined. In order to achieve the goals of this study, the researcher considers the qualitative research design as the most effective.

1.8 Research design: qualitative research

Since this study is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative research design is utilised. There are two approaches to research; a positivistic approach or natural sciences approach, which is usually linked to quantitative methods, and an anti-positivist approach, linked to qualitative methods. Positivistic research sees the social world as a concrete and unmoving reality. On the other hand, an anti-positivist and interpretive approach, which is usually linked to qualitative methods, sees reality as subjective, able to be socially constructed and altered by individuals. This is the way in which social reality was positioned in this study – as a subjective reality in which each

gay individual has his/her own individual disclosure experience in his/her organisational context.

The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that quantitative research primarily focuses on measuring, counting and controlling variables, whereas a qualitative researcher attempts to explain phenomena through an in-depth understanding and thick detailed descriptions of participants' thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews and narrative discourse, this study determined the gay participants' thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions on disclosing their sexual identity in their organisational contexts, thereby providing thick descriptions for the themes extrapolated. Quantitative research is based on statistical methods and outputs and quantifiable measures. In juxtaposition, qualitative research is focused on human experiences, behaviour, emotions, organisational functioning, social movements and experiences. Qualitative research is exploratory and has a flexible design, where it can be constructed and reconstructed, such as is the case with the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study (Gicuru 2017:3; Rahman 2017:102–103; Thanh & Thanh 2015:26; Welman *et al* 2007:6–7).

Unlike quantitative research, which is precise and objective, qualitative research is subjective in nature, because it takes human experiences and the meaning that they ascribe to these experiences into account. The experience of disclosure of sexual identity and/or any reality-altering event is a human experience involving people ascribing meaning to these experiences. Critical to qualitative research is gaining rich text, insights and in-depth information. The purpose of this study was to gain rich data and insights to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceived influence of reality-altering events on the interaction behaviour within organisational context and, therefore, it was more suited for a qualitative design (Gicuru 2017:3; Rahman 2017:102–103; Thanh & Thanh 2015:26; Welman *et al* 2007:6–7).

Before a discussion of the specific qualitative methodologies can ensue, the type of research that the researcher followed should be clarified.

1.8.1 Basic research

Basic research is also known as pure and fundamental research. It is motivated by a need to know and provide an expansion or widening of existing knowledge and a deeper understanding of phenomena (Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory [N.d.]; Legal

Information Institute 2019; Locke, Silverman & Spirduso 2010:76). Basic research aligns with the purpose of the study of identifying, explaining and labelling a previously unexplored phenomenon – re-communication – and to provide thick descriptions and an in-depth understanding of a conceptual framework called the re-communication conceptual framework.

1.8.2 Exploratory-descriptive research

This study aims to identify, explain and label the phenomenon of re-communication and the concepts of the re-communication conceptual framework. It is an exploratory-descriptive study, where exploratory research can be explained as a means to understanding a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon in greater depth. Furthermore, interpretivists, by implication, adopt an exploratory orientation when new data needs to be collected and little research on the topic exists. As was already established, there is little existing research on identifying, explaining and labelling the previously unexplored phenomenon of re-communication and developing a re-communication conceptual framework and, therefore, this research is exploratory. Exploratory researchers frequently collect and use qualitative data, because it offers a more open approach and insight into the topic, which aligns with the aim of this study of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of re-communication and the re-communication conceptual framework. To this end, exploratory research usually leads to insight and comprehension, rather than accurate collectable reliable data, which supports the purpose and goals of this study (Babbie & Mouton 2001:79–80; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:29; Mouton 2009:102; Neuman 2000:21–22; Open University 2012; Pitout & Du Plooy 2001:302).

1.8.3 Strategy of inquiry

The strategy of inquiry for this study is phenomenology. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:283) identifies the following three types of strategies of inquiry that are used when conducting qualitative interpretivist research, as in the case with this study: ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology. In this case, a conceptual theoretical framework – the re-communication conceptual framework – was developed, as well as the identification, explaining and labelling of a previously unexplored phenomenon, namely re-communication. The re-communication framework is not a theory *per se,* but rather a re-communication conceptual framework, which lends itself to a phenomenological strategy of inquiry. Moreover, as argued by Littlejohn and Foss (2008:34, 37 & 43–44), communication theory is divided into seven traditions of which phenomenology is one

and, in this way, this strategy of inquiry aligns with both qualitative interpretivist studies and with communication traditions. Furthermore, the main premises of phenomenology, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (Section 4.4), directly align with the purpose of this study.

1.9 Research problem and questions

1.9.1 Formulation of the research problem

The research problem is that there is little extant knowledge of the possible influences that reality-altering events may have on interaction behaviour emerging after such an event, termed *re-communication* for the purpose of this study. Consequently, there is a gap in the body of knowledge and a need for the identification, explanation and labelling of a communication phenomenon that is currently poorly understood. There is also little existing information to provide an in-depth understanding and thick description of the communication interaction behaviour and strategies in which gay individuals engage and use for the non-disclosure and/or disclosure of their sexual identity within their organisational contexts.

1.9.2 Research questions

Based on the research problem, the following research questions can be identified:

- What influences gay individuals to either disclose or not-disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?
- What communication strategies do gay individuals use when they do not yet want to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?
- What communication strategies and/or interaction behaviours do gay individuals use or engage in to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?
- What is the perceived alteration of interaction behaviour that occurs after the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?

1.9.3 Research goal

The main goal of the study is to provide thick descriptions of a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon termed *re-communication* and to provide a re-communication conceptual framework for the possible influence of a

reality-altering event on interaction behaviour within the organisational context. Within the context of this study, the reality-altering event occurs when a gay individual's sexual identity is disclosed to colleagues.

Within the context of the main goal, the sub goals of this study are to:

- Gain an in-depth understanding of how and/or if gay individuals perceive their disclosure to influence their interaction behaviour with their colleagues within their organisational contexts;
- Provide a thick description of the re-communication phenomenon; and
- Identify the different communication strategies and interaction behaviour used by gay individuals during the various stages of the re-communication process within their organisational contexts.

1.10 Thesis outline

This thesis begins with the contextualisation of the theoretical underpinning – firstly, symbolic interactionism, followed by social constructionism and constructivism – with a clear indication of the reasons for selecting these theories. Hereafter, the following constructs and topics are discussed: disclosure of personal information, sexual and professional identity, the practices and characteristics of organisational climate and/or culture, organisational communication, the practices and characteristics that may influence the relational development in organisational contexts. Each section includes relevant research explaining gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity in the organisational context.

The theoretical foundation and the literature review are used to set up the interview and narrative questions in preparation for data collection. The data involved in the phenomena involved was collected by means of in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and narrative discourse. The collected data was used to conduct a thematic textual analysis, in order to develop the dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes that supported the development of the re-communication conceptual framework. The development of the themes and sub-themes also lead to a definition of each. The afore-mentioned points related to the data collection are all discussed in the research design and methodology chapter. The explanation of data collection is followed by the delineation of the findings and the subsequent interpretation of the collected data. The

thesis concludes with an overview of the study, its limitations, implications and contributions.

The thesis is structured in the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

The first chapter includes the context to the research problem, research goal and questions and the background that guided the design of the research questions. After contextualising the key theoretical concepts involved in the study, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the research design and methodology that is utilised and the contribution of the study contributes to the discipline of Communication.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundation: Symbolic Interactionism, Social Constructionism and Constructivism

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical foundation of the study and contextualises the choice of the theoretical foundation, addressing the related theories that are used to build and support the main thesis, particularly from a communicative perspective. The following theories are explained and critically explored in Chapter 2: symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism. The particular significance and relevance of these theories to the study are explicated in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3: The Relationship between Organisational Identity, Climate and Culture and Disclosure

Chapter 3 focuses on contextualising the literature that supports the study. Queer studies are justified as not being part of the literature, while the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity in a heteronormative environment is explained in the chapter. The application of disclosure is explored by means of the social penetration theory. After an explanation of relevant identities, the chapter presents an explanation of organisational climate and/or culture and the characteristics and practices that may influence relational development, based on an organisational climate and culture characterised by trust, loyalty, mental wellbeing, good teamwork, *etc.* Previous research dealing with the disclosure of sexual identity in the organisational context is embedded throughout the chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents and motivates the research design and methods that support the identification, explaining and labelling of the previously unexplored communication phenomenon and the development of a conceptual framework for re-communication.

Chapter 5: Re-Communication Conceptual Framework: Elements influencing Disclosure Decisions and Self-Preservation Communication Strategies

The findings and interpretation of this study are divided into Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 presents the findings and the interpretation of the data, indicating the implications of the findings of the first two dominant themes for the re-communication conceptual framework – i.e. elements that influence disclosure and/or non-disclosure and the self-preservation communication strategies participants use while deciding if or how they wish to reveal their sexual identity. The findings were interpreted in relation to the dominant, broad and sub-themes that emerged from the thematic textual analysis.

Chapter 6: Re-Communication Conceptual Framework: Reality-Altering Event (Disclosure) and Re-Communication

Chapter 6 is dedicated to presenting the findings and interpreting the data, indicating the implications of the findings of the final two dominant themes for the re-communication conceptual framework, namely the reality-altering event and re-communication, and their related broad themes and sub-themes extrapolated from the thematic textual analysis.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, Limitations, Contributions and Direction for Further Research

The thesis concludes with a brief overview of the study and its unique contribution. Chapter 7 presents a description of the limitations of this study in conjunction with the possible heuristic value of the limitations for future studies, as well as an exploration of the possible implications of this study for professional practice and applied settings.

1.11 Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication). Within the context of this study, this communication phenomenon is referred to as *re-communication*. In order to explore this communication phenomenon,

the study focuses on the re-communication between gay individuals and their colleagues after the gay individual discloses his/her sexual identity to a colleague. However, it should be noted that, although gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity in the organisational context is the sample utilised, the study could have been applied to other reality-altering events in varied contexts. –People ultimately co-construct social realities in all contexts, and the reality-altering event of disclosure of this information could influence communication in varied contexts, with varied reality-altering events. Therefore, the theoretical underpinning is focused on the social construction of co-constructed social realities and the interaction behaviour of individuals as applied to symbolic interactionism.

A further purpose of this study is to provide thick descriptions, to gain in-depth insight of the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure, the self-preservation communication strategies gay individuals use when they do not want to, or are still deciding how to disclose their sexual identity at a given point, the reality-altering event – made up of communication disclosure strategies and/or spontaneous communication by the gay individual or those external to the individual – as well as the perceived influence of the reality-altering event on interaction behaviour after disclosure, termed *re-communication*. To this end, a secondary purpose of the study is to develop a re-communication conceptual framework, which includes elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure, self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and the resultant influence on interaction behaviour, namely, re-communication, which again could be understood in varied reality-altering events.

It is foreseen that this exploratory-descriptive qualitative research will contribute to the field of Communication Science by offering the identification, explanation and labelling of an unexplored communication phenomenon – re-communication – and identifying and defining each of the dominant themes and associated broad themes and sub-themes as concepts towards the emergence of a re-communication conceptual framework. The re-communication conceptual framework will provide depth, insights and thick descriptions of the re-communication process, thereby offering gay individuals insight into trends in reality-altering events, which, in this case, will be insights into the disclosure of sexual identity with which they may be able to identify and that may give them insight into their own disclosure experiences. On a wider scale, the communication phenomenon and dominant themes (the broad themes and sub-themes will not have as much

transferability, in that they are specific to gay individuals) could also guide people experiencing variable reality-altering events. The communication phenomenon and newly developed re-communication conceptual framework could also provide insight into the advantages of prolonged cooperative engagements in the organisational context influencing positive organisational climates and/or cultures. It is envisioned that the study could assist leadership in organisations to foster a more inclusive organisation by encouraging practices such as increased trust, mental wellbeing for employees, loyalty towards colleagues and the organisation, positive interpersonal relationships, better teamwork, *etc.* This has the potential to bring about improved practices towards gay individuals and other marginalised groups in the organisational context.

The next chapter presents the theoretical underpinning on which the study is based and it explains why symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism were selected. It is recognised that multiple theories may have aligned, but symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism were selected, given the emphasis of the purpose on socially constructed realities, co-constructed social realities, reality-altering events and the influence each has on interaction behaviour.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate and understand reality. ~ Vygotsky

2.1 Introduction

This chapter forms the theoretical foundation of the study and focuses on the theories of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism. The selection of these theories as the theoretical foundation is based on the arguments of the purpose and focus of this study being directly aligned with the core tenets of the theories. – The participants' perceptions of the influence of their reality-altering event (i.e. the disclosure of their sexual identity) on their interaction behaviour with colleagues is considered, based on the meaning and perceptions that they ascribe to the interactions between themselves and their colleagues when they are still deciding if and/or how they will disclose their sexual identity. Furthermore, their perceptions of the influence of the actual disclosure of their sexual identity (as reality-altering event) on their interaction behaviour and co-constructed social reality with each colleague, who finds out they are gay, are also determined. Several of these perceptions are influenced and/or formed by means of socially constructed views, which then influence an individual's socially constructed reality. Moreover, it is argued that these communication strategies applied in the disclosure stage will bring about an alteration in the co-constructed social realities between the participants and their colleagues, having gone from a position of not knowing or not acknowledging an individual is gay, to knowing.

Because gay individuals operate within a heteronormative environment, the meaning and symbols that they ascribe to operating in a society as a gay individual, are subjective interpretations, based on social behaviour and their experiences and interpretations of disclosing their sexual identity previously. This social behaviour, in turn, influences their interaction behaviour when disclosing. These postulations are in direct alignment with symbolic interactionism, which, in its simplest terms, can be described as a sociological school of thought that concerns itself with the relationship among individuals within a society. Communication, symbols and the interpretation of meaning is the way in which

individuals will make sense of the world. Therefore, symbolic interactionism is concerned with the influence that linguistic or gestural communication by means of symbols has on social behaviour and how social structures are best understood by means of subjective individual interactions. At the core of this study and within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, it is posited that reality-altering events may influence individuals' interaction behaviour, their social constructions and the meanings they ascribe to given situations, and, in turn, how their co-constructed social realities may be altered by the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity to their colleagues.

The core focus of symbolic interactionism is that the social construction of reality is based on the meaning ascribed to a given situation and that meaning is communicated and understood via language. The importance of interaction behaviour within organisations and the way in which the perceived influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour influences the individuals' interaction behaviour with colleagues, as well as the organisational climate and/or culture. Some form of disclosure is necessary for the development of interaction behaviour and, within this context, interaction behaviour within their organisational context.

The interpretation and creation of meaning from an interpretivist perspective is individualistic. For the purposes of this study, it is focused on the perceptions, meaning and experiences of the possible self-preserving communication strategies that gay individuals may use to conceal or avoid disclosure of their sexual identity, and/or disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational context. This is coupled with how and/or if this reality-altering event influences their interaction behaviour with colleagues, and, in turn, how this may or may not alter the co-constructed social reality that they share with those colleagues to whom they disclose to their sexual identity within their organisational contexts.

To this end, it is argued in this chapter that individuals will interpret and create meaning by means of language. Language is symbolic in nature and, therefore, individuals create meaning through language and the meaning they ascribe to a given experience may influence their interaction and social behaviour in a given context. Leahy (2016:30) explains that language is socially constructed through human interaction, which implies that, without humans, language would not exist. In the interpretive context, an individual's unique socially constructed reality is not an objective social reality, but rather a

culmination of the individual's experiences, interpretations, symbols, interactions and the meaning that s/he ascribes to this entire process. Individuals interact with other individuals, in this case colleagues, and collectively co-construct a social reality that is based on their collective experience, interpretations, symbols, *etc.* The exchange of meaning through language and symbols, which is communication, is the way in which individuals make sense of the world and, in this case, their disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues in their organisational contexts. In the interpretivist paradigm, it is argued that no objective social reality exists, but rather that social reality cannot be divorced from individuals' perceptions and interpretations of a given situation.

Due to the highly complex nature of communication, it should be noted that an effort to develop some sort of "formula" to improve interaction behaviour would inevitably fail as circumstances become more complex. Hence, the view that Littlejohn and Foss (2008:6) take, is that of Craig (1999:161–199), who posits that the only way that the complexity of communication can be understood, is if people come to the understanding that communication will never be united by a single theory. Instead, there will be multiple theories, based on specific communication settings and a multi-theoretical orientation that could assist in identifying, explaining and labelling a particular phenomenon. This is also the position of the researcher in this thesis.

A multi-theoretical orientation is subsequently considered most effective to identify, explain and label a previously unexplored communication phenomenon and its subsequent re-communication conceptual framework. This view of a multi-theoretical orientation is also in support of the interpretivist position on knowledge construction, namely that the human social world is subjective and in a constant state of flux. Consequently, a socially constructed reality is understood differently by different researchers, resulting in different approaches and perspectives.

It needs to be explained that, while gender studies and queer theory can be linked to this study, sexual and gender identity as concepts are not core to the theoretical foundation of this study. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication) – not the exploration of gender and sexual identity *per se*, or why individuals are gay, although the sample of the study is on gay individuals. Hence, gay individuals are used as an example

or a case study, in order to apply the theoretical principles of the phenomenon and frame the re-communication conceptual framework.

Therefore, the focus is not on the discourse of homosexuality and the construction or deconstruction of heteronormativity and social norms, but on the influence of disclosure of any reality-altering event on interaction behaviour and the way it may alter co-constructed social realities. In this case, the reality-altering event happens to be the disclosure of a person's sexual identity as gay. However, for all intents and purposes, it could have been the disclosure of any other reality-altering event and its disclosure to others such as, but not limited to, the disclosure of being sexually harassed, being HIV positive, the death of a loved one, being raped, having a terminal illness, *etc.*

In this chapter, symbolic interactionism is firstly discussed, because it is argued that the way in which individuals develop their socially constructed reality and their social behaviour is influenced by communication, which, in turn, is influenced by the language and meaning ascribed to symbols – in this case, the meaning ascribed to the disclosure of a reality-altering event. Symbolic interactionism is focused on the process of interaction in the formation of meanings through the interpretation of symbols and language as the carrier of these symbols. In other words, symbolic interactionism explores the way in which individuals interact with one another and society and form meaning through these interactions. In this case, the experiences and meaning that gay participants ascribe to the disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues in an organisation.

After interaction behaviour has been explored (from a symbolic interactionist perspective), the chapter continues with an explanation of the theory of social constructionism. Social reality is a social construction and is in a constant state of flux. Consequently, a social reality exists at a given time, based on an individual's personal experiences and social constructions of his/her social reality at that point in time and the society in which s/he operates and *vice versa*. Hence, social reality is constantly changing, based on an individual's personal experiences and social constructions, coupled with the joint co-construction of reality s/he experiences with others. In this case, not only the social constructions linked to the disclosure of being gay, but also the gay individual's personal experiences of disclosing his/her sexual identity and how this, in turn, has influenced his/her co-constructed social reality with others. Moreover, the

existing co-constructed reality that s/he shares with colleagues is also influenced by his/her disclosure, because, as the disclosure takes place, the co-constructed social reality the gay individual shares with a colleague is altered from a position of the colleague not knowing or not being sure the individual is gay to knowing it for sure. It is because of the emphasis that social constructionism places on social constructs and the meaning ascribed to them differing from individual-to-individual and society-to-society, and the unique nature of these socially constructed realities that this theory was selected.

However, it is acknowledged that a socially constructed reality is a jointly constructed understanding of the world and, therefore, in this case gay individuals would have unique co-constructed social realities with each of the colleagues to whom they disclose within their organisational context. However, their own and their colleagues' perceptions would also be influenced by the meaning, symbols and jointly constructed understandings of gay individuals in the society in which they exist. Thus, social constructionism is an important theoretical consideration for this study.

In closing, this chapter explains constructivism within a communication context and in particular, the complexity and/or sophistication an individual has of organising, perceiving and interpreting things. Constructivism is influenced by communication as well as psychological aspects. The aspects related to communication patterns are the most relevant to the purpose of this study and, therefore, these aspects (communication patterns) of constructivism will be explored.

A more in-depth discussion of the theories of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism follows. In each instance, the ideological foundation of the given theory is explicated, followed by a critique of the theory. Finally, the particular theory is contextualised in terms of its relevance to this study.

2.2 Symbolic interactionism

2.2.1 Ideological foundation of symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theoretical framework in sociology that concerns itself with how individuals make sense of the world, and how they create meanings through their interaction processes. Symbolic interactionism is used in the effective evaluation of interaction behaviour between people.

Symbolic interactionism is the way in which individuals, through meaningful and repeated interactions, interpret their own experiences, the meaning they assign to things and how they create and maintain a socially constructed reality. Meaning is central to behaviour and by its symbolic and semiotic nature, language is the vehicle that individuals use to make sense of their own and others' behaviour. Individuals negotiate meaning rooted in their experiences and perceptions of a given context. Individuals continually interpret the meaning of symbols through their thought processes and experiences. Language and meaning and the way in which individuals use language to exchange meaning and, in turn, construct and co-construct social reality, is of particular significance, because in the context of symbolic interactionism, reality is a set of social constructs, which are social mechanisms created and developed by individuals and societies to be an accepted societal practice. Each social construct is made up of a symbol (Addo 2018:2064–2065; Carter & Fuller 2015:1; *Dictionary.com. Definitions* 2013; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:49; University of Twente [2019]).

A symbol is something that is abstract and arbitrary and represents something else to which individuals and/or societies make meaning through their interactions and associations. For example, a blue light on a pole may represent a police station and a snake wrapped around a sword represents something medical. These examples demonstrate that a symbol is something that represents something else. Symbols are only understood as such, if there is shared meaning between individuals and groups about what they represent, because then the specific idea they present is understood. Symbols – which can be in the form of words, pictures, *etc.* – have meanings that are constructed by individuals and these symbols are shaped and attained in the interaction processes with others. These symbols are part of what individuals use to construct their socially constructed reality. While these constructions are subjective, they are also influenced by the individuals' interactions in the society in which they exist. The meaning of these constructs is based on the meaning an individual ascribes to them and the understanding s/he has of them, based on the society in which s/he lives and works (Gabatz *et al* 2017; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:14; Redmond 2015; Tubbs & Moss 2008:73).

As discussed in Chapter 1, social reality is distinctive from physical reality and individual cognitive reality, in that it is created at the social interaction level and is a subjective interpretation of the meaning an individual ascribes to a given situation or context, based

on interactions. The construction of social reality is based on an individual's perceptions and input into a given situation. The construction of social reality is what determines what people think, and how they feel and behave in relation to a complex social world (Bless & Greifeneder 2018:2; Lynch & McConatha 2006:89). In the context of this study, the construction of social reality includes gay individuals' use of communication strategies and/or spontaneous communication to disclose or not-disclose their sexual identity to their colleagues, and how the gay individuals' perceive, think and feel about this communication experience. The gay individuals and their colleagues also establish co-constructed social realities, which are altered by the disclosure and a colleague goes from not knowing an individual is gay to now knowing. These co-constructed social realities between the gay individuals and their colleagues may also determine the elements that may influence disclosure or non-disclosure of sexual identity to colleagues in the organisation.

In order to review the ideological foundation of symbolic interactionism further, the history of symbolic interactionism needs to be unpacked, so that the ideologies making up this theory can be contextualised.

2.2.2 Historical overview of the foundations of symbolic interactionism

The origins of symbolic interactionism can be traced back further than the 1930's. Human group life, which is part of the framework of symbolic interactionism, can be traced back to classical Greek philosophers, such as Heraclitus (500BCE). Much of Western thought around communication, meaning and interaction can be attributed to the Greek philosophers. Aristotle, a leading Greek philosopher, alludes to meaning and language in Chapter 111 of *Rhetoric*, written in 350BCE and the importance thereof by stating that, "… speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do." This quotation refers to speech (language) and meaning as being pivotal elements to speech, in order for speech to be able to deliver its intended message and purpose. Language and meaning are core tenets of symbolic interactionism and this comparison to Aristotle's rhetoric shows that the foundation of symbolic interactionism and focus of symbolic interaction on language and meaning were already embedded in the work of philosophers long before the coining of the term *symbolic interactionism* (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53; Prus 2004:5; Pudephatt & Prus 2007:268).

Symbolic interactionism is attributed to different scholars from a variety of fields, including pragmatists, philosophers and sociologists. All of these scholars, including, but

not limited to, Baldwin, Becker, Blumer, Cooley, Denzin, Dewey, Goffman, Hochschild, James, Kuhn, Mead, Pierce, Simmel, Stryker and Thomas. These scholars contributed to the development and refinement of the theory in their own right and, consequently, it is not possible to credit any one of these scholars as the founder of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1986:1; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53; Wagner 2007:122).

Blumer (1986:1), who coined the term *symbolic interactionism*, posits that, while all these scholars have significant differences in their philosophies and beliefs on how symbols, meaning, language, *etc.* are explained and interpreted, all of them have contributed to the intellectual foundation of symbolic interactionism, because they have all viewed and studied human group life in a like-minded manner. Due to the number of key figures who influenced symbolic interactionism, there are many intellectual underpinnings of this theory, but the most significant remain pragmatism and psychological or social behaviourism (Baran & Davis 2012:373; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53; Wagner 2007:122).

Authors such as Baran and Davis (2012:373), Blumer (1986:1), Collins (2011:156), Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:53), Littlejohn and Foss (2011:99) and Wagner (2007:122) state that symbolic interactionism is based on George Herbert Mead's thinking about the mind, self and society. However, it was Mead's student and follower, Herbert Blumer, who coined the term *symbolic interactionism* in 1969, which, although it was not supported by Mead, became the commonly used name for this theory. In fact, Blumer (1986:1) himself states "…the term symbolic interactionism is a somewhat barbaric neologism that I coined in an offhand way in an article in man and society and the term somehow caught on and is in general use today".

Although Blumer coined the term *symbolic interactionism*, it is posited that theorist George Herbert Mead's lecture, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934) started the trajectory of symbolic interactionism. Even earlier than 1934, Mead started the formulation of the theory in his 1922 lecture titled *A behaviourist account of the significant symbol*. Mead's work, coupled with that of Herbert Blumer, who established it as an intellectual movement within the field of Sociology, make up the ideological founders of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1986:1; Collins 2011:156; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:82–83; 160–161; Mobley 2010; Schwandt 1998:231–232; Steinberg 2007:60; Tubbs & Moss 2008:82–83; Wood 2004:89).

Based on Mead and Blumer being recognised as the founding fathers of symbolic interactionism, the primary focus of the first half of this chapter is to establish the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism, based on Mead and Blumer's work of symbolic interactionism. This is followed by the explanation of the significant symbol in symbolic interactionism. Meaning is pivotal to the theory of symbolic interactionism and one of the ways of referring to meaning within this theory is as a "significant symbol", which is an important aspect to be discussed.

The next section explores the key concepts involved in the ideology of symbolic interactionism. This is followed by a critique of symbolic interactionism and the relevance of symbolic interactionism to this study. The section concludes with a table giving an overview of the key thrusts of symbolic interactionism and its context to this study.

2.2.3 George Herbert Mead's contribution to symbolic interactionism

Although George Herbert Mead, a pragmatist and social psychologist, never published his own work, he contributed to books, journals and newspapers and he gave several lectures on the topic of symbolic interactionism over several years. His book *Mind, self and society* (1934), which is core to symbolic interactionism, was transcribed by a stenographer from Mead's notes, lectures or articles. All the books about Mead's work were compiled in a similar way (Morrione 2004:1). As Morrione (2004:1) explains, the complexity of Mead never having actually authored his own work means that those who wrote up and published his works interspersed their own thoughts and interpretations into his work, which then also came to be associated with Mead. An example of this is the use of the term *social behaviourism*, which is the term associated with Mead's views on social psychology. However, this term was never actually used by Mead himself, but was used by Morris in the introduction to Mead's book.

In the preface to Mead's book, Morris (1934:xii) explains that, although Mead was not a follower of a specific theorist or philosopher, he was influenced by various figures of the time. Mead studied under Royce, who is believed to have influenced Mead's thinking around the social nature of the self, and Royce's views on morality influenced Mead. Mead also studied in Leipzig with Wundt, where the emphasis at the time by some of the influential social psychologists such as Tarde, Baldwin, Cooley and Giddings was on the social influence of language. Not only was Mead influenced by some of these mentors, but also by his close friend Dewey (Morris 1934:xi–xiii). Although Mead drew on the work of some of these thinkers, he also criticised them for not going "… the whole way to

explaining how minds and selves arose within conduct" (Mead 1934:xiii, xiv). Mead wanted to show that the self and a person's mind (thinking), to a large extent, emerge out of social interaction, where language is seen as the mechanism for thinking (Mead 1934:xiii, xiv).

Baran and Davis (2012:373) extrapolate that many leading scholars of the time considered Mead as the founder of social behaviourism, although it was a term he himself did not use. Read from a social behaviourist perspective, behaviour can only be understood when individual acts are contextualised in conjunction with the entire social group and not in an isolated laboratory tested manner. Where traditional behaviourists focused on conceptualising behaviour via experimental means, social behaviourists felt this means of conceptualising behaviour was too simplistic and that it lacked depth. The reason given by Baran and Davis (2012:373) and Mead (1934:6–7) was that cognitive processes that mediate learning and the activity and behaviour of learning forms part of a social process within a social environment and not in an isolated testing environment. Therefore, behaviour can only be understood when individual acts are contextualised in conjunction with the complete social group – not in an isolated laboratory tested manner.

2.2.3.1 Behaviour as a key concept for Mead

For Mead, behaviour as a key concept can only be understood in the context of two elements: social acts and unobservable activities. Mead (1934:6–7) holds that there is more to behaviour than simply that which is observable. That which is merely observable is not interpretivist, but is rather associated with the positivist view of the behaviourists. The approach of the social behaviourists to view interaction as a social and cognitive process, which includes both observable and unobservable phenomena, was in direct opposition to the positivist notion of the time, which focused on experimentation, observable behaviour, and stimulus response experimentation. Mead's view that there is more to behaviour than simply the observable, also resonates with this study, which is an interpretivist study and should be read from the perspective of the interpretivist research paradigm.

Another element of behaviour related to interaction is the social act, explained by various authors as the action or unit of conduct involving two or more participants. Mead (1934:7) defines the social act as a communication process, because a social act requires at least two individuals to communicate with one another. Mead (1934:7) continues that the social act is not about how one individual responds, but rather about the social act as a

whole. For example, if the gay individual discloses to his/her colleague that s/he is gay, it is the entire communication process that takes place during this disclosure and after that will make up the social act (including self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and the proposed re-communication). This act of socialisation can be very short and once off or it can occur over a prolonged period of time (Bergen & Braithwaite 2009:168; Cronk 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:45–46, 53, 57; Hoover & Russo 2002; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:159–162; Mobley 2010; Plunkett [s.a.]; Schwandt 1998:231–232; Steinberg 2007:60; Tubbs & Moss 2008:82–83; Wood 2004:89).

According to Mead (1934:6–7), there are unobservable activities, such as mental processes, that need to be taken into account too when trying to understand behaviour. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, social reality cannot be objective, because reality is dependent on how an individual defines and interprets a given situation. In other words, social reality is not an observable fact that exists within the world; social reality is different for each individual. Each person is an active and dynamic actor, which means that the way in which individuals act within and towards their environment and within social settings is a dynamic process. “This notion of people being active and dynamic actors is in keeping with the pragmatist view of John Dewey (1916), who postulates that the mind is not an object, but rather a thinking process that involves a series of stages and that it should be studied as part of human interaction. Dewey’s focus on the mind (cognitive processing through interpreting and ascribing meaning to other’s behaviour) later became very influential in the development of symbolic interactionism” (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53).

In summary, behaviour within the context of Mead’s work has observable and unobservable aspects and behaviour is influenced through communication between at least two participants, which is an act of socialisation that Mead called the social act. Social reality is a social construction and does not exist separate and independent from human interpretation. This aligns with the purpose of this study in terms of the co-constructed social realities between the gay individuals and their colleagues.

2.2.3.2 The social act

As was already established, the three core concepts in Mead’s original theory are society, self and mind. These three concepts are different aspects of the same general process referred to by both Mead and Blumer as a social act, which focuses on the interaction process. The social act is collective, involving two or more participants. For

example, a social act can occur when someone sends an electronic mail to a colleague to set up a meeting. The social act may also involve extended social acts, such as the interaction behaviour that occurs on a daily basis between gay individuals and their colleagues and contributes to the social construction of co-constructed social realities between gay individuals and their colleagues. These continued social acts may lead to establishing and building strong interpersonal relationships between the gay individuals and their colleagues.

It should also be noted that the complexity of the social act increases, if more actors are involved in the social act. For example, in the organisational context, group gatherings, such as meetings, increase the complexity of the social act. The complexity increases even further when the social acts involve large institutions, because then multiple socially constructed realities come into play. Arguably, the most significant aspect of social acts that need to be considered is that individuals construct their social reality through social acts, which, in the context of this study, implies that gay individuals co-construct social realities with colleagues through social acts. In turn, the gay individuals are performing social acts in their experiences of avoiding disclosure and/or concealing their sexual identity, or disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues (Bergen & Braithwaite 2009:167–169; Cronk 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:45–46, 53, 57; Hoover & Russo 2002; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:159–162; Mobley 2010; Plunkett [s.a.]; Schwandt 1998:231–232; Steinberg 2007:60; Tubbs & Moss 2008:82–83; Wood 2004:89).

Hence, the essence of symbolic interactionism is that individuals create their socially constructed reality, based on the meanings they ascribe to the interaction behaviours of others towards them. As stated by Mead (1934:13), language, which is made up of signs and symbols, is the vehicle by means of which individuals ascribe meaning to interaction behaviour and make sense of their own experiences. “At its core, then, symbolic interactionism is concerned with language and meaning and the role they play in the construction of reality. Symbolic interactionists are therefore particularly interested in the way in which people use language to exchange meanings with one another” (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:49).

Within the social act, meaning arises and the elements of attitudes and gestures have significance. Individuals have a specific attitude towards a given social act, based on their experiences in their interactions. For example, the attitude of gay individuals

towards the social act of interacting with particular colleagues would be based on experiences with these colleagues, and their attitudes towards the social act of disclosing their sexual identity could be based on previous experiences they have had with disclosing being gay to colleagues. All these experiences would contribute to the individual's attitude towards the particular social act. Gestures, on the other hand, are actions that imply a reaction.

The proposition about gestures is that, in the organisational context, individuals' interaction behaviour is influenced by others, based on their interpretations of one another's behaviour. Therefore, gay individuals will interpret the interaction behaviour of colleagues with them and reach certain conclusions based on this behaviour. This interpretation of behaviour will, in turn, influence the ongoing interaction behaviour between gay individuals and their colleagues and *vice versa*. The interpretation of gay individuals of their interactions with colleagues could play a role in how they decide to disclose or not disclose their sexual identity to colleagues. In this way, organisational relationships can be seen as a form of collective behaviour, where every social act has an influence on future acts or behaviour. Through collective behaviour, colleagues are also able to establish predictable patterns of behaviour and they can create and uphold certain rules for professional relationships and conduct. Therefore, it can be argued that, if a gay individuals' sexual identity is disclosed by a colleague without the gay individuals permission, this could go against the professional relationship the gay individual has with a given colleague.

Significant symbols are the next key concept in symbolic interactionism. In the next section, significant symbols are explored in relation to Mead's work on the *mind* and *self.* They are also explored later in the chapter in relation to the ideology of symbolic interactionism as a whole.

2.2.3.3 Mind and self and the understanding of significant symbols

As mentioned earlier, Mead's work is broken up into his rhetoric on the *mind, self and society*. The mind and self, according to Mead (1934), arise out of social processes. He does not look at society in terms of the individual psychology of the human experience, but rather from a communication perspective and the way in which the process of communication is essential to the social order. Da Silva (2011:xv) explains that "… social order emerges from Mead's account as a symbolically constructed reality, not as something natural or imposed on human beings by external institutions or conventions.

Individuals are able to import the attitudes of the community through what Mead terms the ‘generalized other’; only by doing so do they develop a complete self”.

In Mead’s theory, the mind, which arises within the social process of communication, cannot be understood separately from the communication process. The development of an individual’s self is based on his/her social experiences. In the context of the social process of communication, there are two phases: firstly, the gesture and secondly language (Cronk 2005). In Mead’s (1934) research on the mind, his key concepts relate to gestures and he particularly distinguishes between vocal cues and significant symbols. Mead uses an analogy of a dogfight to illustrate the point of the conversation of gestures. As Mead (1934:47) explains, when two dogs get ready to fight, they snap and growl at each other, waiting to attack. This snapping and growling are gestures for attack. One dog’s gestures of snapping or growling, in turn, cause the other dog to change its position based on the gesture. The fact that one dog is ready to attack becomes a stimulus for the other dog to change his/her position or attitude. Whilst this is considered a conversation of gestures, these gestures are not significant, because no conscious behaviour is taking place; the dogs are merely reacting to a stimulus. This analogy is meant to illustrate that, for Mead (1934:42–50), the key to the conversation of gestures is unconscious communication. The individual is not aware of the response that his/her gestures are bringing out in others. In other words, in the conversation of gestures, the individuals are communicating, but they do not realise that they are communicating. It is out of this unconscious communication that language or conscious communication emerges, because, when individuals comprehend their gestures and understand their meaning, these gestures become significant. In other words, for Mead, language is communication through significant symbols (Cronk 2005; Mead 1934:42–50).

Attitudes and gestures are influenced by language, because language is used in the formation of attitudes and the use of gestures within a given context. Language, which is constituted by an indefinite number of signs and symbols, is part of social behaviour. Based on experience, individuals ascribe meaning to the attitudes, gestures and social behaviour that are communicated through language, which, in turn, are used to construct their social reality (Cronk 2005; Mead 1934:42–50).

As stated, language is communicated through significant symbols and Mead (1934:45, 65) postulates that a symbol would only become significant to an individual when that

individual believes that the symbol has meaning. Merely using vocal cues to make a sound does not make these sounds significant symbols; they are simply words, unless they have meaning to the individual involved. For Mead, language is communication through the use and understanding (shared meaning) of significant symbols and the mind is the use of significant symbols, because, through social processes, which includes interpersonal communication with others, the mind considers the attitudes and gestures in all interaction behaviour (Cronk 2005; Mead 1934:45, 65).

Mead also focuses on meaning, universality, reflective intelligence and symbols. These terms are part of the conceptualisation of the general theory of symbolic interactionism and are subsequently discussed, including the conceptualisation of the general theory of symbolic interactionism following the section on Mead and Blumer, because these terms are not exclusive to the work of Mead. However, unique to Mead is his interpretations of the self, which he proposes consists out of the *I* and the *Me,* where the *Me* is also referred to as the "generalised other"*.*

2.2.3.4 Development of the self: the I and Me

Mead (1934:158) opines that the full development of the self occurs in two stages. The first stage is focused on individuals and their attitudes and participation within a specific social act (Mead 1934:158). The second stage not involves only individuals' attitudes, but rather the organisation of social attitudes, because individuals cannot only internalise their attitudes and thoughts, they also need to understand the role of others within an organised configuration (this would be societal roles and norms as an example). This creates an organised and generalised attitude by which individuals could define their conduct and this constitutes the generalised other (Cronk 2005; Mead 1934:135–143). In other words, through the process of socialisation, individuals learn and internalise societal norms and roles and, in this process, the *Me*, or socialised other, is formed. The *Me* is thereby formed through the process of socialisation and tends to serve as a guide governing individuals' behaviour, so that they act in socially desirable ways or according to what is considered the norm.

Therefore, the self is proposed to be a product of an individual's symbolic interactions. The individual's response is that of a dynamic actor and active participator. Mead (1934:173–175) posits that the social foundation of the self is made up of the *I* and the *Me*. The *I* is the instinctive or intuitive 'knee jerk' response of an individual to others. It is not structured, orderly or predictable: it is the impulsive part of an individual's self. The *I*

is present at birth and is linked to an individual's inner-self (Cronk 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:62; Mead 1934:173–175).

The *Me,* on the other hand, is the aspect of self that is determined by social interaction, because it is how individuals see themselves through the eyes of other people, based on the way other people interact with them. The *Me* is sometimes referred to as the "looking-glass self". The picture that individuals see from the interaction with others will influence their self-esteem. Therefore, the *Me* is formed through the continual symbolic interaction with society and those within it and forms the part of the self that leads to individuals behaving in ways that are considered to be socially acceptable (Cronk 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:62; Mead 1934:173–175).

In relation to this study, the *I* and *Me* have significance for gay individuals on a personal level, as well as for the organisation. It should be noted that the *I* is usually referred to as a knee jerk reaction and, in this case, the unplanned, accidental and spontaneous disclosures and/or reactions. The *Me,* on the other hand, is almost always thought out, planned and thus strategic. On a personal level, it is proposed that gay individuals will contend with their attitudes and thoughts intrapersonally, as they mull over their decision of disclosing their sexual identity and the way in which disclosure will alter the co-constructed social reality they share with colleagues and the influence it may have on the interaction behaviour between them and their colleagues. The *I* could even be associated with a spontaneous form of disclosure, if, for example, during a social act such as a colleague insulting gay individuals in the presence of the gay individual and the gay individual is then spontaneously prompted to announce his/her sexual identity to the colleague. This could be considered a knee jerk response as indicated previously. The possible influence of the reality-altering event of disclosure on interaction behaviour and the alteration on the co-constructed social reality gay individuals share with colleagues will occur on a continual basis with each colleague to whom they disclose. Therefore, there will be a continual interplay between the *I* and *Me*. The *I* and the *Me* may enter a conversation about whether or not disclosure should or should not happen.

Therefore, it is assumed that, each time gay individuals engage in the social act of disclosing their sexual identity with their colleagues, they will have their inner-self to contend with (the *I*), as well as their belief/s of the socially acceptable norms within society regarding sexuality and the disclosure of sexual identity and the way this may or

may not influence their interaction behaviour with colleagues (the *Me*). It is postulated that, through interactions with others, gay individuals will internalise certain attitudes and perceptions regarding 'gayness', individuals' perceptions of gay individuals and what are considered acceptable practices within a given society concerning sexual identity. These in turn, are likely to influence their interaction behaviour, the communication strategies and the various communication disclosure strategies and/or forms of spontaneous communication those disclosing may utilise. The disclosure selection would most likely be based on the gay individuals' perceptions of colleagues and their position on the social spectrum of attitudes, beliefs and perceived perceptions of gay individuals.

Moreover, the *I* and *Me* are of particular significance within an organisational context, because, within a professional context, individuals have to maintain their professionalism in their interaction with colleagues at all times. Professionalism is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, but professionalism, it can be argued, is learnt behaviour, based on societal norms of what it means to behave in a professional way. Therefore, professionalism can be directly linked to the *Me.* Hereto, within an organisational context, employees are expected to contain the *I* and display acceptable professional behaviour (in accordance with the *Me*. In other words, in the organisational context, the socially accepted behaviour associated with the *Me* is considered to be more appropriate. The prominence of the *Me* in relation to professionalism means that, within an organisational context, this learnt behaviour of professional rules of social engagement and not allowing an individual's *I* to take prominence will possibly lead to more constrained communication.

Based on the previous discussion, it is important to consider "minding" or "thinking" from a symbolic interactionist perspective. "Minding" or "thinking" is a dynamic relationship in which there is an interplay (or internal discussion) between the *I* and *Me*; a personal struggle between an individual's instinctive response, measured against societal and generalised attitudes that would be considered "appropriate". This interplay between the *I* and the *Me* is the way in which individuals make sense of their experiences, or, in the case of this study, interpret and illicit interaction behaviour within an organisational context. It is further proposed that it is also through this process of "minding" that individuals, and in this case gay individuals, decide how to disclose their sexual identity. This, in turn, affects their social reality with colleagues and the subsequent infusion of their sexual identity into their professional identities, as well dealing with a colleague's responses and attitudes and change in communication, if they disclose their sexual

identity (Cronk 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:62; Mead 1934:173–175). As can be seen, “minding” and “cognitive complexity”, which are discussed under social constructivism, have certain principles and concepts in common.

2.2.3.5 Society as a core principle of symbolic interactionism

The final concept explored by Mead (1934:227, 269) is “society”, which is seen as a social organism where individuals are members of this social organism. Society is not only a collection of individuals, but also a holistic series of social acts in which individuals participate and this makes up a social collective or whole (Cronk 2005; Mead 1934:7, 130). Mead posits that society cannot exist without the mind and the self, but that the mind and self cannot function in isolation, because the generalised other (as was discussed previously) is the result of interacting within a particular society and internalising the norms of that society through the process of socialisation. The area in Mead’s work that is most significant to this study involves the universality of discourse and attempting to create shared meaning. Hence, universality in the way it is discussed in this context will be considered to mean, “shared meaning”. Mead (1934:268–269) purports that, for discourse to be considered universal and for individuals to know what the appropriate responses would be in a given situation, discourse has to be revisited continuously, because the meanings of symbols may change over time and what is considered universal understanding or shared meaning of behaviour, attitudes, symbols and truth may alter. When individuals combine certain symbols, they will illicit certain responses from others and, in order for individuals to cooperate with one another, their understanding of the symbols and the symbols used should be mutually understood. Without mutual understanding and shared meaning, language and significant symbols cannot exist.

It is important to view universality in the context of significant symbols and language from an interpretivist, as opposed to a positivist, perspective due to the paradigm from within which this study should be read. Within this context, “universal” does not imply universal meanings shared by everyone, but rather that universality is working towards shared meaning, recognising that meaning is subjective and unique for each individual. Mead (1934:269) associates the universal with the significant symbol, when he states that, “… the only universal that is involved is in the use of significant symbols. If we can get the set of significant symbols, which have in this sense a universal meaning, anyone that can talk in that language intelligently has that universality”. In other words, for the significant symbols to have universality or shared meaning, individuals need to

understand the language and ascribe meaning to the significant symbols that are used. The concept of the significant symbol is not only postulated by Mead; it is also at the core of symbolic interactionism and is discussed further in the principles of symbolic interactionism later in this chapter.

2.2.4 Herbert Blumer's contribution to symbolic interactionism

Blumer (1969:2) builds on Mead's principles by deviating from the dominant positivistic paradigm of the time. Blumer (1969:2) believes that positivism ignores the importance of the meaning that individuals' assign to their experiences and the social reality that individuals construct based on these experiences. He focuses on the importance of the meaning people assign to experiences, and how these experiences and their meaning are used to construct an individual's social reality, which is all in alignment with this study and the interpretivist paradigm.

Blumer (1969:2) holds that there is more to human behaviour than uncontrolled external forces and psychological factors. Based on these insights, Blumer (1986:2–5) proposes that symbolic interactionism rests on the following three premises:

- Firstly, human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that they ascribe to those things (things according to Blumer (1986:2), includes everything that individuals may note in their world; it could be physical objects, other individuals, categories of individuals such as friends or enemies, institutions, *etc.*).
- Secondly, meanings are created through individuals' activities and interactions with each other. Blumer (1986:4) proposes that 'things' have two types of meaning: an intrinsic meaning and a meaning based on individuals' perceptions of that thing. Thus, there is an intrinsic meaning of what 'gayness' is and then there are individuals' perceptions of what it means to be gay. These perceptions, then, are based on individuals' ideas, memories, motives, *etc.* The perceptions are a result of social interactions and the socialisation process and it is these perceptions about gay individuals that influence the interaction behaviour between gay individuals' and their colleagues.
- Thirdly, the meaning of things is formed in the context of social interaction. Meaning is not merely an application of the meaning derived from the social interaction; instead, these meanings are dealt with and modified through an interpretative process. Ascribing meaning to an experience forms part of a process of interpretation, which involves self-interaction (between the *I* and the *Me*). This

process of self-interaction or minding then, gives meaning, context and depth to a given situation.

Furthermore, Blumer (1969:6) coined a term called “root images”, which he explains as follows: “symbolic interactionism is grounded on a number of basic ideas, or ‘root images’ as I prefer to call them. These root images refer to and depict the nature of the following matters: human groups or societies, social interaction, objects, the individual as an actor, human action, and the lines of action. Taken together, these root images represent the way in which symbolic interactionism views human society and conduct” (Blumer 1986:6).

In the case of the organisational context, the social structures and culture play a significant role in how individuals communicate with each other within a professional context because of well-established norms about what professional conduct entails. These norms and principles can be linked to what Blumer (1986:10) referred to as abstract objects. Objects are classified by Blumer (1986:10) as follows:

- Physical objects, such as a book, a chair, a piece of fruit;
- Social objects such as religious leaders, a mother and a friend; and
- Abstract objects, such as moral principles and philosophical doctrines or ideas such as justice or freedom.

These objects would cause reactions from individuals depending on the meaning individuals would ascribe to the given object. Two types of actions can take place in the organisational context, namely individual actions and collective actions. Individual actions refer to the meaning these objects have to an individual, based on the meaning that a particular object holds for that individual, which is based on his/her social construction of reality. These objects are social creations and in symbolic interactionism, the individuals are social beings and are sociable. Self-interaction takes place when an individual ascribes meaning to an object. In this way, an individual does not merely respond to an object, but rather engages with the object, reflects, takes note, determines and ultimately gives the object meaning that is used as a basis for directing his/her actions. In other words, the actions individuals take are the result of an interpretation process.

As opposed to individual actions, there are collective actions. Maines (2001:67) explains that "… for Blumer, social structure is action; it is an ongoing; recurrent pattern of happenings constituted by people meeting and handling situations. But, with the introduction of a new line of activity at some 'point of entry' … established social relations can be modified by their relations to the new line of action". Collective actions, on the other hand, refer to how individuals align their lines of action according to their interpretation of things they encounter with one another. The longer a group engages in joint actions, the more the members of the group will know how to act towards one another; have pre-established meanings of what is expected; and each participant would therefore be able to behave in a way that is cognisant of these pre-established meanings. Each individual will still have to build his/her lines of action by fitting actions to one another and aligning with this, so that the individual's line of action fits into what others do. In other words, an individual will examine what s/he is doing or intends doing and s/he will align his/her actions with the actions of others, thereby creating collective actions (Blumer 1986:10–20).

The focus of this study is on individual actions (gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity), where the meaning of these actions is not inherent in the object itself, but is based on the meaning that an individual assigns to that specific object and the way in which that individual will act towards something will be based on this meaning. This meaning arises through an interpretive and interactive process. An important aspect about the meaning ascribed to an object through the process of interpretation is that it becomes an individual's reality, because what people define as "real" becomes reality for them (Plunkett [s.a.]).

In summary, the focus in symbolic interactionism is on the way in which individuals form meaning and structure in society through communication. In other words, meaning is produced through individuals' interactions. Furthermore, symbolic interaction is the way in which individuals interact with symbols, gestures, rules and roles. Hence, as Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:49) points out, symbolic interactionism concerns itself with the role that language and meaning play in the social construction of reality and the way in which individuals use language to exchange meanings with one another. For Blumer (1986:10-20), interaction is essential to the analysis of human behaviour and meaning evolves from individuals' interactions in their environment and with other individuals. These interactions are interpreted through existing symbols, but the interaction will still occur

subjectively for an individual, because each individual perceives an interaction differently. It is based on the various interactions that individuals have with others within their environment that they will develop an understanding of the larger social structures. Societal norms and values ensure that society affects an individual's behaviour (Plunkett [s.a.]).

For both Mead and Blumer and for symbolic interactionism in general, the significant symbol is a main premise of the theory. Therefore, it will be discussed before a general contextualisation of the theory is provided.

2.2.5 The significant symbol

Symbolic interactionists posit that, as individuals interact in a more meaningful way, they will come to share meaning of certain areas of discourse and non-verbal communication. Based on this shared meaning, individuals come to understand the world in a certain way. Individuals use symbols (language) to negotiate meaning and through this process, the rules and norms of society are established and learned. Symbolic interactionists postulate that self-identity and the ability to use language to symbolise thoughts is acquired through the process of communication. Communication cannot be effective without shared meaning given to the symbols that are used to communicate. Symbolic interactionism is, therefore, a theory that describes the way in which individuals construct their realities and find significance in meaning through their communication behaviour. Therefore, meaning plays a pivotal role in this theory and is discussed in varied ways. One of the ways of referring to meaning in this theory is as a "significant symbol" (Bergen & Braithwaite 2009:166–168; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53; Hoover & Russo 2002; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:159–162; Mobley 2010; Schwandt 1998:231–232; Steinberg 2007:60; Tubbs & Moss 2008:82–83; Wood 2004:89).

According to Plunkett [s.a.], "[a] significant symbol is a word or gesture that has a common meaning to an individual and others". A significant symbol is the term Mead uses to refer to a gesture that has shared meaning – i.e. when two or more people share the meaning of something. Shared meaning is not always easily attainable, because the meanings people ascribe to a situation have subjective meaning specific to each individual. Out of these subjective meanings, a shared meaning should be established, which can be challenging. The implication is that both meaning and socially constructed reality are created or constructed, since both are understood within a social and cultural context. The reason for this is that individuals are part of a social and cultural group with

which they interact and reality is formed through a set of social constructs with which individuals identify, based on the group(s) to which they belong (Bergen & Braithwaite 2009:166–167; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:53; Hoover & Russo 2002; Littlejohn & Foss 2011:159–162; Mobley 2010; Schwandt 1998:231–232; Steinberg 2007:60; Tubbs & Moss 2008:82–83; Wood 2004:89). For example, two gay individuals may have a shared meaning of what it means to disclose their sexual identity within their organisational contexts. The experience of disclosing will be subjective to each individual, but out of each of the gay individual's experiences, they create shared meaning with other gay individuals. Therefore, based on their experiences of disclosure of their sexual identity, the gay individuals ascribe meaning to disclosing being gay to colleagues within their organisations. Out of this meaning, the gay individuals' socially constructed reality of disclosing their sexual identity within their organisational context are constructed, and various co-constructed social realities are constructed between the gay individuals and their colleagues. These co-constructed social realities and re-constructed, post-disclosure social realities are based on gay individuals' experiences with the way in which different individuals ascribe meaning to gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity within an organisational context. These gay individuals are also part of a larger society and cultural group outside of their organisational context and these groups will influence their social constructs of disclosing their sexual identity.

2.2.6 Key concepts of the ideology of symbolic interactionism

Blumer (1986:20) summarises the general perspective of symbolic interactionism by stating:

> *This approach sees a human society as people engaged in living. Such living is a process of ongoing activity in which participants are developing lines of action in the multitudinous situations they encounter. They are caught up in a vast process of interaction in which they have to fit their developing actions to one another. This process of interaction consists in making indications to others of what to do and in interpreting the indications as made by others. They live in worlds of objects and are guided in their orientation and action by the meaning of these objects. Their objects including objects of themselves are formed, sustained, weakened and transformed in their interaction with one another. This general process should be seen of course in the differentiated character, which it necessarily has by virtue of the fact that people cluster in different groups,*

> *belong to different associations and occupy different positions. They accordingly approach each other differently, live in different worlds and guide themselves by different sets of meanings…one must see the activities of the collective as being formed through a process of designation and interpretation.*

This quotation is primarily stating that individuals are guided and their social reality is constructed, by their interactions with other individuals. Individuals will interpret and create meaning, because interaction is symbolic. Humans will engage in self-reflexive behaviours to interpret and create meaning for the actions or gestures of others. Individuals, in turn, will respond to interactions based on these interpretations and meaning. Social reality is a social production of the actors involved in certain social activities. These actions are responses to the actions of other humans. However, the actor does not merely react to an action, but defines and interprets the action by transforming meaning, based on the given situation (Blumer 1969:6; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:38–39; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:160; Suryaningrum 2012:111).

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:50), Mead (1934:268–269), Littlejohn (1999:17) and Littlejohn and Foss (2008:82) reason that language is at the core of cognitive processing and the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism. Language is a coded system that consists of symbols and the mechanism that individuals use to respond to others. Therefore, language is at the centre of every experience that individuals have throughout their lives. Individuals interact through language and this interaction behaviour creates a world of meaning within which individuals are able to give meaning to and understand their experiences. Language, communication and interaction, then, are the three tenets that drive societal behaviour and teach individuals how to behave and respond in specific contexts and give meaning to events.

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:39) posits that, "… a major interest of symbolic interactionists is therefore the way in which human beings assemble meanings. Symbolic interactionists want to comprehend how people define the situations in which they find themselves, and how they produce narratives to explain their actions and lives". Furthermore, symbolic interactionists also want to understand how individuals, through interaction, navigate, manage and transform the meaning that they have constructed in their interactions with others and how these meanings constitute a particular individual's socially constructed

reality. This social reality and the world in which meaning is transformed into an individual's reality are both subjective, semiotic and symbolic. Therefore, in the context of a symbolic interactionist, reality is based on the social interactions in which people engage with one another and in groups, which makes up the group life. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, communication is seen as the vehicle that shapes and transforms the meaning that people ascribe to a given situation on an individual basis. Symbolic interactionism, particularly that of Blumer, Hughes and Strauss, places great emphasis on the role of communicative processes and actions in creating and transforming the social order (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:39; Halas 2012:13–14).

The focus of symbolic interactionism is an individualistic one. This individualistic focus, consequently, aligns with the interpretive research approach, which places strong emphasis on individuals' personal experiences and socially constructed reality. Interpretivism is also the preferred method of inquiry in this study. Symbolic interactionists view social interaction at the micro level of social life, focusing on the way in which individual social encounters function and influence individuals, rather than looking at socio-cultural and socio-political ideological aspects at a macro societal level. The crux of individuals' social encounters is based on meaning and how the meaning that individuals ascribe to a given event, setting or situation would socially construct their realities and influence the way in which they act, based on the way they interpret these realities. These interpretations of meaning are linked to behaviour, because the way in which individuals interpret another individual's behaviour will directly affect his/her own behaviour. Therefore, the way in which other individuals act towards someone will determine an individual's response (Collis & Hussey 2003:53; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:40–41; Halas 2012:3; Mead 1934:267–269).

Led by Blumer (1986:4–10), symbolic interactionists posit that interaction brings about an understanding of common symbols, thereby guiding human action, so as to reinforce shared meaning, obtaining greater understanding and establishing conventions, such as roles and norms that enable further interaction to take place. However, interaction is an ongoing process that involves the cognitive process of interpretation, which implies that the meaning of symbols is in a constant state of flux. Symbols are open to interpretation, re-evaluation and further alterations, even if shared meaning is managed within human group life. Therefore, meanings change from time-to-time, from situation-to-situation, and from one group to another, owing to the flexible and ongoing process, which denotes

symbolic interactionism and the use of symbols and the meanings people ascribe to them (Blumer 1986:4–10; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:41; Halas 2012:4; Matsueda 1992:1580).

All the focus areas in this study – the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity to their colleagues, the in-depth understanding of the communication used by gay individuals while they are still deciding if or how they wish to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues and/or when disclosure of their sexual identity takes place, coupled with the possible influence this disclosure has on communication and the co-constructed reality between the gay individuals and their colleagues – are considered as a social production. The actors involved in each of the social activities (interactions) with the gay individuals are their colleagues. It is proposed that gay individuals define and interpret each of their colleagues' responses to their disclosure and interpret the interaction between themselves and their colleagues.

In summary, within the context of this study, symbolic interactionism refers to how gay individuals construct and co-construct social reality with each of their colleagues. Based on these co-constructed social realities, the gay individuals will decide what self-preservation communication strategies to use while avoiding disclosure or concealing their sexual identity and when disclosure of their sexual identity itself occurs. As previously stated, people assign meaning to their interaction behaviour with others. In this way, the gay individuals will assign meaning to their interaction behaviour with their colleagues once they have disclosed their sexual identity to them. The factors that may encourage and discourage a gay individual to disclose his/her sexual identity, interaction behaviour while the gay individual is avoiding disclosure and/or concealing his/her sexual identity, the reality-altering event itself and the possible influence on the interaction behaviour between gay individuals and the colleagues may influence the gay individuals socially constructed reality of what it means to disclose a sexual identity within an organisational context.

2.2.7 Critique of symbolic interactionism

In the late 1960s, psychologists tended to critique symbolic interactionism for having a lack of rigour, evidence and replicable procedures. While it can be argued that psychologists tended to be speaking from a behaviourist and positivist viewpoint when criticising symbolic interactionism, this critique was still damaging to the reputation of symbolic interactionism (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:49–53; Halas 2012:4; Stryker 2008:28–31). Stryker (2008:28–31) argues that symbolic interactionism has been regarded as a

dated theory, whereas Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:65) explains how “some theorists have also come to view symbolic interactionism as a redundant theory. It is therefore quite often excluded from contemporary discussions and it is often marginalised in prevailing theoretical work. In addition, social constructionism (which does form part of contemporary discussions) is often presented as though it has no connection to symbolic interactionism. Moreover, symbolic interactionism seems to be ignored in the current renaissance of pragmatism.” Halas (2012:4) observes that symbolic interactionism has been criticised for being overly subjective because of its focus on individual perception.

However, in the context of this study, the unit of analysis is individuals. The purpose is to gain insight into the way in which individuals socially construct reality and come to understand what it is like to disclose being gay and how their co-constructed social reality with colleagues influences their interaction behaviour in organisational contexts, when they decide to disclose their sexual identity. This is achieved by understanding the perception that gay individuals have about how this disclosure may influence their interaction behaviour and alter their co-constructed reality with each colleague they disclose to and this is based on individual perceptions. The disclosure of sexual identity is deeply personal and a subjective experience and thus aligns with symbolic interactionism.

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:49–53), Halas (2012:4) and Stryker (2008:28–31) argue that some critics consider symbolic interactionism as a micro-theory, a schematic and simplified way of viewing the world. In other words, it is criticised for its subjective nature and its focus on face-to-face interactions, not considering macro structural levels, such as structural, political and historical issues that influence interaction behaviour. However, as much as it is criticised for its micro-sociological focus, symbolic interactionism is also praised for reinstating the individual’s importance in symbolic exchange and involvement in interaction and this study is focused on gay individuals symbolic exchange and interaction behaviour disclosing their sexual identity within their organisational contexts.

This study is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm and the subjective nature of meaning and social reality and the possible influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour. Therefore, the researcher revisited the importance and relevance of symbolic interactionism and its application to this study, in order to ensure that symbolic interactionism will actually provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Although

symbolic interactionism went out of vogue in the 1960s and 1970s, it was revived in the 1980s. As Stryker (2008:28-31) points out, the revival of symbolic interactionism came about in various factions, including the discipline of Psychology, who some 15 years prior had rejected this theory. This revival saw several inclusions of the theory of symbolic interactionism in various fields of study and, with it some variations, such as structural symbolic interactionism. However, these variations do not add value to the purpose of this study and, therefore, they have not been discussed.

2.2.8 The relevance of symbolic interactionism to this study

The relevance of symbolic interactionism is explained below and conceptualised in Table 2.1. Symbolic interactionism is particularly relevant to this study for several reasons, many of which have been outlined in the previous sections. One of the foremost reasons for the relevance of symbolic interactionism is that it subscribes to the interpretivist ontological and epistemological positions, which is the paradigm from within which this study was conducted and should be read. Interaction behaviour with colleagues is a personal form of interaction and it is important for individuals to build relationships with their colleagues to work more effectively, even though these are generally professional relationships. Positive work relationships are important for increased mental wellbeing, productivity, loyalty, job satisfaction, psychologically safe workspaces and an inclusive and positive organisational climate and/or culture, which are further explored in Chapter 3.

Hereto, the meaning and perception that individuals ascribe to their co-constructed social realities with colleagues. The perception and meaning they ascribe to the disclosure experience – before, during and after disclosure of their sexual identity as gay to colleagues within their organisational contexts – as well as the influence that co-constructed social realities have on interaction behaviour are imperative to deepen the understanding of the purpose of the study. Theories and approaches, such as symbolic interactionism, which attempt to explain and deepen understanding of the depth of meaning that an alteration in co-constructed social realities and an influence over interaction behaviour would bring about, are particularly useful for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon involved in this study – i.e. the gay individuals' perception of how this disclosure influences their interaction behaviour and alters their co-constructed social realities.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that individuals co-construct their social realities through their interactions with others, which is why they are co-constructed social realities. Each experience will influence a person's own construction of reality, which is always in a state of flux. These experiences will develop the individuals' own reality and co-constructed social realities. Individuals perceive and interpret each interaction that they have in a different way, which means that social reality and interaction behaviour are reciprocal and intertwined.

Another reason for symbolic interactionism being relevant is that this is a communication study and symbolic interactionists posit that individuals develop meaning by means of interaction behaviour. Within the context of symbolic interactionism, communication and relationships are often mentioned or discussed. In fact, the term "interaction behaviour", as defined in Chapter 1, encompasses both interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships. Interaction behaviour also provides structure to an individual's identity. The ability to use language as a symbolic way of organising thought is acquired via the communication process through interaction behaviour. Communication cannot take place without shared meaning of the symbols used to give interaction behaviour meaning. Symbolic interactionism, then, is a theory that looks at the way in which individuals construct their social reality and find significance in meaning through their interaction behaviour. In this study, it is theorised that gay individuals, who are the participants in the study, co-construct social realities with their colleagues, based on the interaction behaviour that they have experienced with their colleagues. Based on these co-constructed social realities with various colleagues, the gay individuals will decide if and/or how they will disclose or not disclose their sexual identity. In this way, they maintain the current co-constructed social reality, or they alter the co-constructed social reality by disclosing their sexual identity. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify and gain an in-depth understanding of how a reality-altering event may influence the interaction behaviour of the individuals experiencing the reality-altering event.

Table 2.1 provides the researcher's conceptualised overview of symbolic interactionism in relation to this study. The table considers the key theoretical thrusts of symbolic interactionism, relevance to the study at an individualistic level and the concomitant relevance of symbolic interactionism to organisational contexts.

Table 2.1: Overview of symbolic interactionism (SI) in relation to this study

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
Ideological foundation of SI	• SI is a social psychological theory. • Construction of reality is based on the meaning ascribed to a given situation. • Meaning is communicated and understood via language. • Meaning is the core of SI; • Reality is constructed by the meaning individuals ascribe to their existence. • Reality is a set of social constructs. • Social constructs are made up of symbols. • Symbols are part of what individuals use to construct their reality.	• Meaning is an individualistic concept. • Individuals ascribe meaning to a given situation. • Individuals ascribe meaning to symbols based on their experience. • Social reality is a subjective interpretation of the meaning an individual ascribes to a given situation or context. • The meaning of constructions is based on what meaning an individual personally ascribes to them.	• In this case, the experience and situation are interaction behaviour within an organisational context and co-constructed social reality with colleagues. • The meaning that the individual ascribes to the experience (disclosure of his/her sexual identity) in the context of this study occurs within an organisational context.
History of SI	• The origins of SI can be traced back to classical Greek philosophers. • SI is not only attributed to one scholar, but rather varied scholars. • The scholars that have contributed to SI come from varied worldviews, including pragmatists, philosophers and sociologists. • Although many scholars contributed to the formation of SI, George Herbert Mead and his student and follower, Herbert Blumer, are considered founding fathers.	• Mead's three core aspects are the mind, self and society, with the mind and self being highly individually focused.	• Society as one of the core aspects of Mead's postulations on SI is collectively focused like an organisation. An organisation would be considered an organised group within society.

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
Mead's contribution	• George Herbert Mead was a pragmatist and social psychologist. • Although a founding father of SI, Mead never published his own work. • He contributed to academic works and they were later turned into original works. • Those who published Mead's work, also infused their own thoughts and work into these books; so they do not represent a pure perspective of Mead. • Mead is associated with the term 'social behaviourism'; • Social behaviourism is not a term Mead himself used, but because of other people's influence in his publications, the lines became blurred between what was his and the other authors. • Mead was influenced by the following people's work: Royce Wundt, Tarde, Baldwin, Cooley and Giddings. • For Mead and from an SI perspective, language is pivotal as a mechanism for thinking.	• For Mead, individuals' sense of self and thinking emerge from social interactions with others.	• The social interactions in this case are those interactions that happen within an organisational context between colleagues when one colleague discloses to another that s/he is gay.
Behaviour in SI	• Behaviour is a key concept for Mead's theorising on SI. • Mead's interpretation of behaviour needs to be understood in conjunction with two concepts: the social act and unobservable activities.	• In the social act, each individual can be seen as a dynamic actor and each individual acts and reacts differently in various contexts.	• Although individual acts and behaviour are an important aspect of SI, they can only be understood when contextualised in a social group. In this case, the social

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
	• Social behaviourists view interaction as a social and cognitive process.	• From a symbolic interactionist perspective, there is no objective social reality, because social reality is dependent on how an individual defines a given situation. • Social reality is not an observable fact that exists within the world; it is different for each individual.	group is work colleagues in an organisational context.
Social act and unobservable activities	• The social act involves individuals communicating and, therefore, the social act can be seen as a communication process. • Within the social act, meaning arises and various elements have significance. • These elements are attitudes and gestures. • A social act will invoke an attitude and these attitudes are formed by experiences. • Gestures, on the other hand, are actions that imply a reaction. • Mead believed that there was more to behaviour than simply what individuals observe. • What individuals do not simply observe, are unobservable activities like an individual's mental processes/thoughts *etc.*	• Individuals have a specific attitude towards a given social act, based on their experiences in their interactions. • Individuals construct their social realities through social acts, which in the context of this study, implies that gay individuals construct their social realities through social acts within the organisational context.	• The social act is a collective act. • The complexity of the social act increases, if more social actors are involved in the social act. For example, within the organisational context, group gatherings, such as meetings, increase the complexity of the social act. • The complexity increases when the social acts involve large institutions, since multiple realities come into play. • Through collective behaviour, colleagues are also able to establish predictable patterns of behaviour, and create and uphold certain rules for professional relationships and conduct.

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
Significant symbols	• The process of communication is essential to the social order. • Language is communicated through significant symbols. • When a symbol has meaning to an individual based on his/her experiences, then that would be a significant symbol. • Through language, there is shared meaning of significant symbols. • Based on this shared meaning, individuals come to understand the world in a certain way. • Communication cannot be effective without shared meaning given to the symbols that are used to communicate.	• Symbols are only significant to an individual when they have meaning to that specific individual. • Individuals are part of a social and cultural group. • Reality is formed through a set of social constructs with which individuals identify, based on the group(s) to which they belong. • The experience of avoiding disclosure and/or concealing sexual identity and/or disclosing an individual's sexual identity will be subjective to each individual, but out of the experience(s) of each of the gay individual, s/he creates shared meaning with other gay individuals. • Self-identity and the ability to use language to symbolise thoughts is acquired through the process of communication.	• People use symbols (language) to negotiate meaning and through this process, the rules and norms of society and in this case an organisation are established and learned; • Meaning and reality are constructed or co-constructed since both are understood within a social and cultural context.
I* and *Me	• For Mead (1934:158), the full development of the self happens in two stages: the individual and social attitudes.	• On a personal level, it is proposed that the gay individual will contend with his/her altered reality when	• *I* and *Me* is of particular significance within an organisational context because within an organisational context

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
	• The social foundation of the self is made up of the *I* and the *Me.* • The *I* is the impulsive part of a person's personality – instinct, a knee jerk reaction. • The *Me,* is formed by social interaction. It is the perception that an individual has of how others see him/her. • This interplay between the *I* and the *Me* is how individuals make sense out of their experiences, or, in the case of this study, interpret and illicit interaction behaviour within an organisational context.	s/he discloses his/her sexual identity. • Change in communication after the disclosure and his/her reality is re-created on a continual basis through the interplay between the *I* and *Me.* • Each time the gay individual engages in a social act of disclosing his/her sexual identity with his/her colleagues, the gay individual will have his/her inner self to contend with (the *I*), as well as what s/he believes are the socially acceptable norms within society regarding sexuality.	individuals have to always maintain their professionalism in their interaction with colleagues and the *Me* is formed through social interactions such as those with colleagues. • Professionalism is learned behaviour, based on societal norms of what it means to behave in a professional way. Therefore, professionalism can be directly linked to the *Me*.
Society as a core principle of SI	• Mead's final concept is society, which is seen as a social organism. • The generalised other is part of Mead's discussion on society and is the result of interacting within a particular society and internalising the norms of that society through the process of socialisation. • The area in Mead's work that is most significant to this study is around the universality of discourse and attempting to create shared meaning.	• Although society strives for shared meaning, meaning is subjective and will be unique for each individual.	• Society is a social organism. • The gay individuals in the sample of this study are also part of a larger society and cultural group outside of their organisations and these groups will influence their social constructs of disclosing their sexual identity.

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
	• Universality in the way it is discussed in this context is considered to mean, "shared meaning" and does not imply universal meaning because that would not be interpretivist.		
Blumer	• Blumer focuses on the importance of the meaning people assign to experiences and how these experiences and their meaning are used to construct an individual's reality. • For Blumer (1986:2-5), there are three premises on which symbolic interaction rests – (i) humans act towards everything in life based on the meaning they ascribe; (ii) meanings are created through people's activities and interactions with each other; (iii) meaning always occurs within a context in which the social interaction takes place. • Symbolic interactionism is about the role that language and meaning play within the social construction of reality. • The way in which individuals use language to exchange meanings with one another.	• Meaning is produced through individuals' interactions. • Meaning evolves from an individual's interactions in his/her environment and with people. • There are different types of objects and these objects form an individual's reality.	• In the organisational context, the social structures and culture play a significant role in how individuals interact with each other within a professional context, because of well-established norms about what professional conduct entails. • Two types of actions can take place in the organisational context: individual actions and collective actions.
Ideology	• Individuals are guided and social reality constructed by their interactions with other individuals. • Individuals will interpret and create meaning, because interaction is symbolic.	• Within the context of this study, symbolic interactionism refers to how the gay individual constructs his/her co-constructed social reality with his/her colleagues.	• Collectively, all interaction behaviour will shape the gay individuals' meaning of interacting as a gay individual within an organisational context.

Concept	Key theoretical thrusts of SI	Relevance of SI to the study at an individual level	Relevance of SI to organisational contexts
	• Humans will engage in self-reflexive behaviours to interpret and create meaning for the actions or gestures of others. • Language is at the core of cognitive processing and the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionism and is, therefore, at the centre of every experience that individuals have throughout their lives. • People interact through language and this interaction behaviour creates a world of meaning within which individuals are able to give meaning to and understand their experiences. • This reality and the world in which meaning is transformed into an individual's reality are both subjective, semiotic and symbolic. • Reality in the context of a symbolic interactionist is based on the social interactions in which people engage with one another and in groups. • Communication is seen as the vehicle that shapes and transforms the meaning that people ascribe to a given situation on an individual basis.	• Based on these co-constructed social realities, the gay individual will then decide, which communication strategies to use to conceal or disclose his/her sexual identity to his/her colleagues.	

(Addo 2018:2064–2065; Baran & Davis 2012:373; Blumer 1969:2; Blumer 1986:1–5; Carter & Fuller 2015:1; Cronk 2005; Da Silva 2011:xv; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:39, 49, 53, 62; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:14; Gabatz *et al* 2017; Halas 2012:13–14; Mead 1934:6–7, 42–50, 135–143, 158; Morrione 2004:1; Morris 1934:xi–xiii; Prus 2004:5; Pudephatt & Prus 2007:268; Redmond 2015; Tubbs & Moss 2008:73).

2.3 Social constructionism

2.3.1 Ideological foundation of social constructionism

It is critical to understand the importance of social constructionism in communication and organisational structures and contexts. Allen (2005:35) summarises this succinctly by stating that "…to study processes of organizing, communication scholars increasingly rely on social constructionism, a theoretical orientation to socio-cultural processes that affect humans' basic understandings of the world. Scholars who take a social constructionist stance claim that anything that has meaning in our lives originates within the matrix of relationships in which we are engaged." In social constructionism, it is recognised that reality is socially constructed and the way in which individuals and societies would analyse the process of reality as a social construction is through the sociology of knowledge. Social constructionism shares several characteristics with symbolic interactionism and, in this study, it is explained in relation to symbolic interactionism. Knowledge is an effect of social processes and individuals construct their reality based on social practices. As has been argued, meaning, as a key tenet of symbolic interactionism, is socially constructed and significant symbols are used in the construction of an individual's reality. In the view of social constructionists, there is no social objective reality, but rather a social reality in which interpretation is social.

Social constructionism goes against the positivistic ontological view of reality being universally understood and governed by laws that can be discovered. Instead, social constructionism finds its roots in phenomenology and theorises that meaning and reality are individually constructed, which means that reality is a social construct. It is also critical to note that, for social constructionists, meaning and knowledge are derived from larger social constructs and social systems – not from individuals – and language plays a significant role in disseminating and gaining an understanding of these constructs (Allen 2005:36, Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009; Beaumie 2012; Berger & Luckmann 1966:13, Cromby & Nightingale 1999; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:56–57; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:44–45).

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), Beaumie (2012), Cromby and Nightingale (1999) and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:56–57) explain that the original social constructionist theory, which was termed "the social construction of reality", is attributed to Peter Berger and

Thomas Luckmann. Berger and Luckmann were influenced by authors such as Marx, Nietzsche, Scheler and Mannheim, who are viewed as the original theorists of social constructionism. As elucidated by the founding fathers, the core premise of social constructionism is that "reality is socially constructed and the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs" (Berger & Luckmann 1966:13). Berger and Luckmann (1966:15) continue: "… it is our contention then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such knowledge. And in so far as all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations…" This quotation implies that human knowledge is constructed through both individual and group social interactions.

In their treatise, Berger and Luckmann (1966:33–35) explain that social reality is subjective and holds meaning on a subjective basis, established on each individual's own interpretations of social reality. It is imbued by each person's thoughts and actions in relation to his/her social context. It is acknowledged that this phenomenological analysis of social reality is based on subjective experiences and, therefore, it lacks causality. These authors recognise that a detailed phenomenological analysis would need to be done, in order to understand the layers of each individual's experience to a given situation and/or object and probe the different structures of meaning. The example they give towards this phenomenological analysis is the experience of being bitten by a dog, the memory of having been bitten and, therefore, having a fear of dogs. If this example is applied to this study, it may mean that, if an individual disclosing his/her sexual identity has a negative experience of disclosure, resulting in a friend at work communicating with him/her negatively or less friendly post-disclosure, it may lead to the gay individual fearing disclosing his/her sexual identity to others in the organisation. This analogy is also connected to the social constructionism treatise of conceptualisation around multiple realities being in existence at a given time. In the context of this study, the reference to multiple realities could be aligned with the way in which an individual's disclosure experiences would depend on the multiple co-constructed social realities s/he shares with different colleagues (Berger & Luckmann 1966:33–35).

Additionally, it is noted that social constructionists examine reality as a dynamic process, because reality, according to this theory, does not exist outside of what an individual produces and reproduces as reality. This reality is constructed through daily social

interactions. In this way, reality is co-constructed by individuals creating and participating in their life stories: it is their perceptions of what reality is that make up their reality. The meaning that is derived from these day-to-day activities arises from the interactive human community with which individuals engage (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009; Beaumie 2012; Cromby & Nightingale 1999; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:56–57; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:44–45; Sankarasubramanyan & Joshi 2013:17).

Similar to symbolic interactionism in social constructionism language is the foundation of building social reality and is focused on reciprocity between people in language interactions. Language is used during interaction, which leads to the behaviour that would be determined by the social reality to which people ascribe a given construct, thereby making it subjective in nature. Individuals need to make sense of their experiences. This is done via systematically arranged ideas that form a type of guide into which individuals would try to fit their experiences, which is known as a construct. Although social constructs are not objective, people do take on their social constructs as their reality and, therefore, these social constructs become the social reality for these individuals. Individuals ascribe meanings to signs, e.g. a weapon's initial intent was hunting for food, but in modern society, it has become a sign of aggression and violence on the one hand and a sign of protection on the other, depending who is carrying the weapon (Berger & Luckmann 1966:49–53; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:57; Falkheimer & Heide 2006:186–187). Furthermore, Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:57) and Falkheimer and Heide (2006:186–187) explain that, similar to symbolic interactionism, meaning is proposed to be produced through peoples' interactions with society and objects.

Moreover, and connected to this study, the treatise of social constructionism alludes to the concept of heteronormativity in theorising about the way in which individuals interconnect with a particular natural environment and or state of being, while being bound by cultural and societal norms and order. In this way, humanness is shaped by these socio-cultural norms (Berger & Luckmann 1966:66–67). This has implications for gay individuals, because as per the cultural and societal norms, most people assume that most people are heterosexual. Berger and Luckmann (1966:67) argue, "… ethnological evidence shows that, in sexual matters, man is capable of almost anything. One may stimulate one's sexual imagination to a pitch of feverish lust, but it is unlikely that one can conjure up any image that will not correspond to what in some other culture is an established norm …". This theorisation is deeply significant for the manifestation of

sexuality and operating as a gay individual within a particular social context, because this would imply that, should the social context in which an individual operates not consider being gay as culturally acceptable, a gay individual may have a more difficult time disclosing his/her sexual identity given the established norms.

In their treatise, Berger and Luckmann (1966:55) also expound on when language becomes symbolic by explaining, "… any significative theme that thus spans spheres of reality may be defined as a symbol, and the linguistic mode by which such transcendence is achieved may be called symbolic language". These symbolic representations are generally considered as things that are detached or abstract from everyday life, while still playing a critical role for individuals, although they are less easy to define and objectify at times, but are deeply symbolic, such as philosophy, science and religion. In this way, they remain quite abstract to the individual but often hold deep and differentiated meaning.

In social constructionism, language also plays a dominant role in organisations, which aligns with the context of this research, namely that of an organisational context. Social constructionists do not consider language as passive and simplistic when it comes to objective reality. Instead, language is acknowledged as a social interaction that carries great power within the organisational context, because language creates the social structure of the organisational context and information is communicated within organisations via language. Concerning language and reality within an organisation, Falkheimer and Heide (2006:187) explore the way in which the social structure of an organisational context is constructed by the people within an organisation through communication, by stating that:

> *Language is both a vehicle to produce and reproduce the social reality, and a vehicle to understand the world around us. New members are socialised into the organisation and internalise the institutional world of the organisation. If organisations are regarded as social constructions, communication among the organisational members is the essence of the production and reproduction of the social structure.*

It is important to note that new members, who join an organisation, are socialised into the organisational culture. Communication is the vehicle that helps create the social constructions within an organisation.

Miller (2005:28) explains that social reality is socially constructed by an individual's experience and social interactions. Social meaning is created through interaction; both in terms of what is happening in the present and what has happened historically, which will both enable and constrain an individual's behaviour. Based on this, it can be argued that gay individuals' interaction behaviour and the meaning ascribed to other colleagues' behaviour within an organisation will be determined by historical and present interaction behaviour between the gay individual and his/her colleagues.

2.3.2 Premises of social constructionism

Historically, like most schools of thought, social constructionism has various interpretations and multiple theorists contributed to the development of this theory, but it is widely recognised that Berger and Luckmann wrote the treatise (Littlejohn & Foss 2008:44). However, Penman (1992:234–237) identifies the following common propositions of social constructionism directly related to communication:

- Communication is intentional;
- Knowledge is socially constituted and exists in a social realm that is occupied by other individuals; and
- Knowledge and the communicative action are a function and part of a given context.

Penman (1992:234–237) explains that collectively, the emphasis of these three principles, for the most part, is that communication has an intended purpose. Various authors, such as Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:60), Littlejohn and Foss (2008:44) and Penman (1992:234–237), explain that communication is based on people's choices and these choices are based on the way in which the individual interprets a given situation. Knowledge is constructed based on individuals' social interactions within their social realm. Through these social interactions, individuals gain meaning from a given situation, and this meaning and the individual's perception make up his /her social reality. The meaning and perception that s/he ascribes to a given situation influences interaction behaviour. The social realm, the individuals' perceived reality and the language used influence the communication behaviour in which an individual takes part within a given context. They are also the way that individuals create common experiences with others.

From these common experiences and the meaning that an individual ascribes to social interactions, an individual forms perceptions of the interaction behaviour that is taking place. These collective perceptions of various elements of human experiences become an individual's social reality. This social reality is socially constructed and is a social product that is specific to a given context and specific interactions with various social groups. Therefore, the meanings that individuals assign to events are always the product of interaction behaviour that is bound by time, place, social context and individuals' perceptions. By implication, the interpretation of what something means may change, if the time, circumstances and situations change.

2.3.3 Features of communication from a social constructionist perspective

Penman (1992:242–244) identifies four features of communication from a social constructionist point of view, namely constitutiveness, contextualness, diversity and incompleteness.

Firstly, Penman (1992:244–245) explains communication as a *constitutive* feature, stating that communication is an intermediary that moves information and acts as the basic building block for social relationships. (In the context of this study, social relationships refer to the work relationships colleagues have with one another). The constitutive view of communication is that communication is an ongoing or dynamic symbolic process that forms and re-forms an individual's social reality.

Secondly, Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:60–61) and Penman (1992:244–245) explain that *contextualness* is a feature of communication, which means that communication is always located within a specific context and it needs to be understood in a context-specific way. Because, all communication is context-specific, it cannot be divorced from the context, which is reason why interpretivists do not generalise. In this study, the context is the specific organisation and the specific colleagues with whom the gay person interacts. The gay person's experiences may be different in a different context (e.g. in a different organisation with different people).

Thirdly, communication is *diverse*: it occurs in different forms, both in the act of communication and in the interpretation of it. Finally, as an on-going and dynamic process, communication is always *incomplete* (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:60–61; Penman 1992:245–247).

Communication as a constitutive feature, communication is proposed, because knowledge about the gay individuals' experiences and perceptions of their reality-altering event is socially constructed with communication as the conduit. Therefore, communication creates the social world in which individuals exist. The constitutive feature has an important influence on meaning, because it can be argued that meaning can alter with each interaction that a participant's interaction has while disclosing his/her sexual identity in the organisational contexts. Different colleagues will react differently to the disclosure, which means that the influence on interaction behaviour will be specific to the colleague with whom the gay individual is interacting, while the extent of the gay individual's disclosure will also play a role. It is postulated that the interaction behaviour that a gay individual experiences with colleagues will differ from colleague-to-colleague and, therefore, the interaction behaviour between them can only be understood within the context of each individual interaction.

Furthermore, the context of this study is the organisational context of gay individuals, where it is believed that the context may influence interaction behaviour. There are rules that govern a professional relationship, such as work ethic and professional courtesy, which may influence interaction behaviour in the organisation. However, each interaction behaviour will also be context specific, based on the colleagues with whom the gay individual is dealing in the organisational context.

Due to the uniqueness of individuals and their unique interaction behaviour with one another, each interaction behaviour and relationship will differ. This means that communication in each interaction with a different colleague will take on a different and idiosyncratic form. Due to the postulation of communication always being considered incomplete, by implication, the interaction behaviour between colleagues will always be in a state of flux.

As indicated previously, there are various authors, who have written on social constructionism, e.g. Michael Foucault's work on discourse analysis also relates to social constructionism. However, the purpose of this study is not to provide a critical analysis of the discourses surrounding organisational relationships between colleagues, but rather to identify and describe the communication used in the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity within their organisational context and the resultant influence of this reality-altering event on interaction behaviour between colleagues. The way in

which this interaction takes place will, in turn, influence how social reality is re-constructed and experienced by the participants.

2.3.4 The critique of social constructionism

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:79) explain that social constructionism remains contested by positivist thinkers, because, unlike social constructionists and constructivists, positivists view reality as something that is factual, objective, universal and independent of human thought. Therefore, positivists criticise the social constructionist and constructivist interpretation of reality as being subjective and cannot be removed from human interpretation. Hereto, these authors state that interpretivist researchers, who use a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, do not aim to discover generalisable rules governing a common social reality that is factually based and universal, because these are characteristics of positivistic quantitative research. Instead, interpretivist researchers subscribe to a social constructionist epistemology of which the aim is to gain in-depth understanding of human experiences as experienced uniquely by an individual. Therefore, the positivist critique does not apply to the purpose of interpretivist research and a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, which are the paradigm and method of inquiry involved in this study. The interpretivist paradigm aligns with the purpose of this research, which is by no means to find generalisable, fact-based responses, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the participants to contribute towards a framework that may add depth and guidance to a field, rather than solve a specific problem.

Another criticism involves the perceived inconsistency in the way Berger and Luckmann treat reality. Overend and Lewins (1973:16) explain how inconsistency arises in the way in which Berger and Luckmann treat reality, stating that, “the authors argue from a relativist position, but with realist assumptions.” This researcher agrees that there is not a clear distinction of meaning and truth in Bergman and Luckmann’s discussion of reality and posits that their treatise to social constructionism focuses on the social construction of perceived reality, rather than presenting a discussion on the sociology of knowledge (Overend & Lewins 1973:20, 23). Given that this research is positioned as a perception study, the position of the critique would still suffice for purposes of this study.

As the founding fathers, Berger and Luckmann (1966:33–35) acknowledge that, in their treatise, reality is subjective and holds meaning on a subjective basis established on each individual’s own interpretations of social reality. It is acknowledged that this

phenomenological analysis of social reality, which is based on subjective experiences, may lack causality. These authors recognise that a detailed phenomenological analysis would need to be done, in order to understand the layers of each individual's experience.

2.3.5 The relevance of social constructionism to this study

Based on the preceding discussion, it is argued that the primary relevance of social constructionism is the way in which individuals' construct their social reality through interaction behaviour, and that social reality results from individuals' perceptions, which have come to fruition, based on their personal experiences and social constructions of their individual and co-constructed social realities with others. Moreover, social reality is constantly changing, based on individuals' personal experiences and resultant social constructions. In this research, the personal experience is the way in which participants experience their disclosure of sexual identity to colleagues in their organisational context. It is purported that the elements that influence the participants from deciding if, when or how they will disclose, will be influenced by social constructs that the participants have constructed, based on past and present social interactions. All the participants' social constructs – what it means to be gay, to disclose sexual identity as a gay individual and to work in South Africa as gay individuals – will influence their communication in their disclosure and non-disclosure of their sexual identity as gay. It is postulated that the interaction behaviour between gay individuals and their colleagues may differ from colleague-to-colleague, depending on the interpretation of historical and present interaction behaviour.

Hence, it is theorised that the re-communication process would not be a single incident, but a constant process of influence in interaction behaviours within the organisational context. If social reality, as evidenced by the social constructionists, is indeed socially constructed, it would mean that each interaction behaviour in which an individual engages is somehow related to his/her sexual identity and would be based on his/her personal experience and perception of this interaction behaviour and the subsequent influence that ensues. It is proposed that gay individuals' decision to disclose or not disclose their sexual identity within an organisational context will ultimately influence their interaction behaviour within the organisational context – because interaction behaviour influences the way in which social reality is constructed and co-constructed.

Now that the basis of social constructionism has been established, it is necessary to explain the theory of social constructivism briefly. Although constructionism and

constructivism are often used interchangeably, they differ from each other and this difference needs to be understood. Bleakley (2003:409) explains that constructionism deals with the social processes involved in the production of reality. Constructivism, in turn, focuses more specifically on individual constructions of reality. However, it should be noted that social constructionism is used within the context of this study, in order to contextualise reality from a symbolic interactionist perspective. The focus of the theoretical foundation is on the social construction of reality within the context of symbolic interactionism, which means that social constructionism is not the basis of the theoretical foundation, but rather symbolic interactionism, with social constructionism and constructivism as supporting theories.

Social constructionism has been contextualised and applied and, at this point, social constructivism will be contextualised and applied.

2.4 Constructivism

2.4.1 Ideological foundation of constructivism

Constructivism is an interdisciplinary viewpoint that spans across multiple disciplines, such as Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, Communication and Critical Educational Theories (Ültanır 2012:199). It is widely posited that Dewey is the philosophical founder of constructivism, with Bruner and Piaget being the pioneering cognitive constructivists and Vygotsky the seminal source in social constructivist arguments. However, it is important to consider that this posit is based on the viewpoint of constructivism and social constructivism as education learning theories and within the fields of Education and Psychology, because epistemologically, constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory that explains the nature of knowledge and the way in which people learn. Therefore, these theorists and aspects of constructivism are not in alignment with the focus of this study or its purpose (University College Dublin [s.a.]; Ültanır 2012:196). It is perceived that, within the context of this research problem, the value of constructivism relates better to those colleagues to whom the gay individual is disclosing his/her identity, which is not the purpose of the study and, therefore, in the context of this study, constructivism is explored in relation to communication and cognitive complexity.

In the communication context, constructivism is considered a theoretical position that focuses on the relationship between social cognition and communication behaviour. It is

associated with the sophistication or complexity of individuals' interpretative processes and orientation in understanding the communication behaviour of others and the social perception of some people having more complex ways of organising, perceiving and interpreting phenomena than others do. In this way, it is important to make sense of entities and events in the social world, including both personal and social experiences. Constructivism is influenced by communication and psychological aspects and, while the constructivist views of social cognition were developed by communication scholars, the roots of social cognition and aspects of constructivism are rooted in Psychology. Constructivism holds that meaning for a person is constructed by him/herself as well as others (Burleson 2011:27–28; Harry 1983:62, 72; Wood 2004:155). The aspects related to communication patterns have the most relevance to the purpose of this study. However, those aspects linked to the psychological aspects are less relevant, because this is not a psychological study. It is perceived that the value of constructivism within the context of this research problem will be better related to those colleagues to whom the gay individual is disclosing his/her sexual identity within his/her organisational context.

As was discussed previously, minding is a concept related to symbolic interactionism (which denotes thinking), which, in turn, can be linked to the constructivist concept of cognitive complexity in the sense that the more cognitively complex a person is, the more sophisticated his/her interpretation processes will be. Hence, construct systems, which are explained by Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:71) as templates into which individuals try to fit their experiences and, thereby construct their social realities are explored within this section.

Symbolic interactionists illustrate how individuals are interpretative beings and active participants in the process of constructing meaning for their activities. However, symbolic interactionism does not focus on how the world is interpreted to assign meaning to objects, people, events and behaviour; this is where the key premise of constructivism lies. Constructivism has its roots in both symbolic interactionism and in the personal construct theory developed by George Kelly in 1955. Constructivism in relation to communication, which was developed by Jesse Delia and his colleagues in the 1970s, is a theoretical approach to communication. The focus of constructivism is on the cognitive processes that are used to create meaning. Constructivists propose that individuals interpret behaviour and act accordingly, based on certain conceptual

categories that are part of an individual's reality. They further postulate that reality is perception-based, in that it involves the way in which an individual perceives the world and then presents this as his/her reality (Littlejohn & Foss 2008:123; Miller 2005:105–106; Wood 2004:152).

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:70) states that:

> *Constructivists hold that people develop constructs and create their socially constructed realities through interaction with others, while previously constructed social structures and contexts constrain these very interactions… socially constructed structures and contexts such as religion, politics and culture can potentially influence perceptions of appropriate behaviour within a particular context, and consequently affect how behaviour is interpreted.*

Various authors, such as Beaumie (2012), Brooks (2002) and Littlejohn and Foss (2008:123–125), explain that social reality is constructed through the interpretation of human actions. Knowledge is also a social construction, where learning is a social process and not an individualistic one. Yet, although learning is viewed as a social process, constructivists purport that individuals construct their own social realities and, therefore, no two individuals' social realities will be similar. This does not mean that social constructivists believe in multiple realities that are uncontrolled and suspended with no grounding, but rather that each individual experiences and perceives social reality in a different way, because each individual is unique. Individuals interpret reality according to conceptual categories that are social constructs learned through interactions with other people and these social constructs have social origins from which they are constructed.

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:70) states that "… although constructivists acknowledge the impact of social interaction and culture on the cognitive system, they maintain that within these social structures and contexts, people develop their own *conceptual categories* that further shape their actions and interpretations." The *Business Dictionary* (2015) defines a *cognitive system*, as referred to in the previous quotation, as "a mental system consisting of interrelated items of assumptions, beliefs, ideas and knowledge that an individual holds about anything concrete (person, group, object, *etc.*) or abstract

(thoughts, theory, information, *etc.*). It comprises an individual's worldview and determines how he or she abstracts, filters, and structures information received from the world around. Also called cognitive belief system". This means that, although individuals are influenced by culture, social interactions and social structures, they will still be influenced by their own individualistic view of the world, attitudes and beliefs making up their personal constructs to influence the actions and interpretations of an individual. Cognitive systems can also be understood as construct systems that are focused on differentiation. They need to be classified by the individual into his/her own categories, which will help him/her to make sense of the world and form his/her social reality. The individual will classify experiences into categories, based on differentiation and then ascribe meaning to these categories. Constructs are organised into different complexity levels and an individual's cognitive complexity will determine the strategies that s/he uses in his/her communication (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2012:70; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:123).

In the sections that follow, the main premises of construct systems and cognitive complexity of social constructivism are explained.

2.4.2 Construct systems and cognitive complexity

It is recognised that individuals with well-developed interpersonal construct systems will behave in a different manner than individuals with a less developed interpersonal construct system (Kline, Hennen-Floyd & Farrell 1990:350). As previously established, individuals need to make sense of their experiences, which is done via systematically arranged ideas that form a type of guide into which individuals would then try to fit their experiences into, which is known as a construct. An individual will have multiple constructs known as "personal constructs", which are sets of personal judgmental dimensions (O'Keefe & Delia 1979:231).

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:71) and Littlejohn and Foss (2008:123–124) explain that a construct is organised into an interpretative scheme and these schemes help an individual to identify something and put it into a category. As an individual matures, so does the complexity of his/her schemes. For example, a young child may not understand the concept of sexual identity but may understand heterosexuality as a couple consisting of a man and a woman. S/he would not understand that this is sexuality or that there is even a construct such as heterosexuality, but would be able to understand that a romantic couple consists of a man and woman. As the child matures, s/he would have more constructs of sexual identity and may even understand the concept of sexual

identity in more complex terms – in other words, understanding that it entails other constructs, such as transgender, bisexuality, homosexuality, heterosexuality, *etc.* The variety and complexity of an individual's personal constructs and interpretive schemes determines his/her cognitive complexity.

2.4.2.1 Type and explanation of constructs

The following three constructs are explained in the following sections: personal constructs, interpretative schemes and cognitive learning abilities.

2.4.2.1.1 Personal constructs

Personal constructs are knowledge structures that are considered building blocks that give an individual the opportunity to evaluate phenomena and to understand and interpret actions. Personal constructs are bipolar or opposite pairs, e.g. homosexual versus heterosexual, ugly versus pretty, hot versus cold. Personal constructs are perception based – e.g. what some may see as ugly, others may regard as attractive – and they differ in terms of sophistication (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:71–72; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:123–124; Wood 2004:153–154).

The more cognitively complex an individual is, the more personal constructs s/he will have. If someone is not cognitively complex, s/he may only evaluate sexual identity superficially. If the individual is more cognitively complex, s/he may have more depth to his/her evaluations of sexual identity and will arguably have more insight into the gay individuals.

2.4.2.1.2 Interpretative schemes

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:72) and Wood (2004:153–154) state that constructs are organised into an interpretative scheme. People make sense of their experiences, after which they place this behaviour, action or phenomenon into certain categories. These categories are also referred to as "interpretative schemes".

An individual may consider the constructs of being effeminate, fashion conscious, using dramatic hand gestures and having a sexual disinterest in women to be categorised into an interpretative scheme of gay men. When a male displays these characteristics, he will be considered gay – even if he is not. However, if an individual is cognitively complex, the constructs that s/he associates with an interpretative scheme will be more sophisticated and not as straight forward as the aforementioned example. The more

cognitively complex individual would also demonstrate a better understanding of some men displaying these characteristics without being gay.

2.4.2.1.3 Cognitive learning abilities

Cognitive learning abilities refer to an individual's ability to understand varied and complex levels of phenomena by using reason, intuition and perception at a higher order. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:72) explains cognitive learning abilities as "a person's ability to learn, using a combination of reason, intuition and perceptions. It therefore encompasses all the mental abilities of an individual as s/he solves problems and handles a variety of situations. It further involves the learning of ideas, concepts and facts that compose an individual's ability to reason and construct meanings and perceptions".

Cognitive complexity is influenced by individuals' cognitive learning abilities, which, in turn, influence the personal constructs and interpretative schemes of an individual. However, as pointed out by Miller (2005:107), an individual's interpretative schemes are likely to become more sophisticated as s/he matures. This is referred to as the *orthogenetic principle.* However, the degree of individuals' cognitive complexity continues to differ.

In summary: cognitively complex individuals tend to have a better perception of subtle differences and nuances in interaction behaviour. Cognitive complexity is based on how complex individuals' interpretative processes are and this complexity is based on how sophisticated an individual is in terms of differentiation, abstraction and organisation. These three dimensions of cognitive complexity are explained next.

2.4.2.2 Dimensions of cognitive complexity

The dimensions of cognitive complexity are sometimes referred to as "facets", but for the purpose of this discussion, they will be referred to as "dimensions". The three main dimensions that are evident from the literature are differentiation, abstraction and organisation. The first dimension of cognitive complexity is *differentiation,* which is based on the number of personal constructs that an individual uses to perceive and judge others. An individual who develops numerous personal constructs will be in-depth perception of things and will, therefore, have more constructs with which to describe and understand a phenomenon (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:73; Wood 2006:155–156). For example, a person's depths of differentiation will determine how sophisticated his/her views are on alternate sexual identity.

The second dimension of cognitive complexity is *abstraction*. Cognitively complex people will make use of abstraction, whereas less cognitively complex people would not. What is meant by abstraction is "the extent to which a person interprets others in terms of internal motives, personality traits and character … abstractness is not necessarily related to accuracy. Abstractness is concerned simply with a person's ability to base interpretations on mental or psychological qualities" (Wood 2006:156). Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:73) illustrates abstraction by observing that "an individual with high levels of abstraction is able to understand how abstract concepts such as people's individual traits and motives shape their behaviour".

The final dimension of cognitive complexity is *organisation*. Wood (2006:156) explains organisation as "the degree to which a person notices and is able to make sense of contradictory behaviour." For example, when a person, who is always friendly and helpful, is under severe stress, they may become aloof, and someone who is cognitively complex will be able to notice it, see it and make sense of them acting out of character.

From a constructivist perspective, cognitively complex individuals have a communication advantage and they are more capable of dealing with sensitive communication situations, because they are person-centred. Wood (2006:157) defines *person-centred* as the concept that cognitively complex people "are more capable of engaging in sensitive communication that is tailored to particular others." Individuals who are cognitively unsophisticated would not necessarily identify as many nuances and may miss subtle differences. Cognitively complex individuals, on the other hand, would be able to distinguish between different individuals' nuances on multiple dimensions and understand psychological dynamics and, therefore, they would have insight into psychological reasons behind behaviours and communication patterns (Wood 2006:157).

Since this is not a psychological study, the concept of cognitive complexity related to psychological behaviour is not applicable, whereas the aspect of cognitive complexity related to communication patterns is relevant. – It is purported that, if the gay individual is cognitively complex, then s/he would be able to alter his/her concealment or disclosure communication strategies and patterns, depending on the colleagues to whom s/he is disclosing or not disclosing his/her sexual identity at a given time and in a given context.

2.4.3 Critique of constructivism

Constructivism has been criticised within the discipline of Communication for its individualistic approach to the processing of information by being focused on the individual alone, when, in fact, communication is a dyadic transactional process. However, it can be argued that the fact that constructivism focuses on the individual does not negate communication as a two-way transactional social interaction process, because it contributes to the overall understanding of communication. Communication is transactional and negotiated in a social way and the individual is still key, because all social interactions are negotiated through individuals and their perceptions. Hereto, all communication still has the individual as the focus (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:78–79). Moreover, when selecting strategies to conceal or disclose their sexual identity, cognitively complex people will engage in more sophisticated intrapersonal communication.

Because this study is focused on the individual as a singular entity and on the individual's interaction behaviour with colleagues by both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, both social constructionism, which is more socially focused, as well as constructivism, which is more individually focused, are relevant to the theoretical foundation of this study.

2.4.4 Significance of constructivism to this study

Constructivism is relevant to this study, in that it could be argued that the more cognitively complex a person is, the more sophisticated or cognitively complex his/her re-communication with his/her colleagues would be. It may also mean that with more cognitively complex colleagues or with more cognitively complex gay individuals, they would likely be more sensitive to the disclosure. Cognitively complex individuals will possibly also be able to alter their interaction behaviour to suit the social setting in which they are engaged at the time and may be more perceptive in selecting communication strategies to avoid disclosure and/or disclose of their sexual identity as gay. In other words, depending on whom the gay individual is communicating with, s/he would decide on the most suitable forms of communication pre, during and post-disclosure for the most perceived positive outcome.

It should be noted that this study is focused on how the gay individual perceives his/her interaction behaviour to be influenced by the disclosure of his/her sexual identity and

his/her experiences – not on the colleagues themselves. Hence, the cognitive complexity of the gay individual's colleagues would fall outside the scope of this study.

2.5 Conclusion

The researcher drew on the core tenets of symbolic interactionism and social constructionism to form the theoretical foundation for this study and to entrench the study in the interpretivist paradigm. Although the specific theories selected may fall into varied paradigms, many have their roots in the interpretivist paradigm. However, even those theories that do not fall into the interpretivist paradigm were incorporated because of their relevance to the problem statement.

The theories discussed all built on the key areas of the social construction of reality, meaning, language and the symbols used to convey messages. All these areas are pivotal to creating a greater depth of understanding of the perceived influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour and the alteration of co-constructed social realities between individuals (in this study colleagues within the organisational context) emerging after the disclosure of a reality-altering event (in this study individuals disclosing their sexual identity).

Symbolic interactionism and its ideological foundation inaugurated this chapter. As was established, people assign meaning to their interaction behaviour with others and, in this way, gay individuals will assign meaning to the interaction behaviour in which they engage with their colleagues prior to disclosure and once they have disclosed their sexual identity to them. The interaction behaviour when the gay individual is still deciding if/and how s/he will disclose and the disclosure of his/her sexual identity as gay with colleagues will make up a part of the gay individual's socially constructed reality of what it means to disclose a sexual identity as gay within an organisational context. Collectively, all communication uses pre, during and after disclosure, which will shape the gay individuals' meaning of interacting as gay individuals within their organisations.

From the theoretical treatise, it is deduced by the researcher's assumption that the symbol of how participants ascribe meaning to being gay is shaped by the meaning that they share with those to whom they disclose, in this case, in their organisational context. The self and an individual's thinking emerge from social interactions and language is seen as the mechanism for thinking – in this case, the communication used for non-

disclosure and disclosure – as well as the possible influence of these communication strategies on interaction behaviour. It is assumed by the researcher that all of these utilise and ascribe meaning to the language in the exchange between the gay individual and his/her colleagues. Individuals will construct their socially constructed realities of what it means to be gay based on social acts and experiences of concealment and disclosure of their sexual identity in the organisation.

The explanation of symbolic interactionism was followed by a discussion on the ideological foundation of social constructionism and constructivism. Social constructionism shares several characteristics with symbolic interactionism and, in this study, it is explained in relation to symbolic interactionism. The researcher focused on the meaning of social constructionism within the context of this study and not on the various accounts or application of social construction, e.g. the social construction of emotions.

It is purported by means of the researcher's assumptions that individuals within an organisational context influence one another's interaction behaviour and the theories covered in this chapter indicate that this influence in interaction behaviour occurs, because reality is a social construct. Therefore, individuals ascribe meaning to a given situation, based on their perception of the given situation. An example in this case is the perception of the gay individual of how his/her communication disclosure of his/her sexual identity has altered his/her co-constructed social reality with the colleague and the gay individual's perception of how this disclosure has altered interaction behaviour with the colleague. This disclosure occurs via language (linked to symbolic interaction) and, once the disclosure has taken place, the socially constructed reality of the gay individual, and his /her colleague's social construction of him/her being heterosexual are changed.

Through the synthesis of these theories, it is argued by the researcher's assumptions that social reality is mostly subjective and is constructed through symbolic interaction. Social reality is a social construction and the external and internal factors that influence an individual's perception of the world alter an individual's social reality. Moreover, social reality is constructed through the symbolic process of communication and individuals are active participants in constructing their own perception of the world.

A discussion on constructivism followed that of social constructionism. It was argued that constructivism is relevant for this study, because it emphasises how the gay individual's level of cognitive complexity contributes to the effectiveness in which the gay individual interacts with colleagues while concealing his/her sexual identity, during disclosure and post-disclosure in the organisational context in terms of his/her sexual identity.

Based on the theories discussed in this chapter, the researcher posits that gay individuals will share individualistic interaction behaviour with each colleague around their sexual identity and co-constructed social realities that are altered post-disclosure. Each of these interactions will, in turn, contribute to the re-construction of the gay individual's socially constructed reality within an organisational context.

The next chapter will focus on the literature review, which specifically deals with the elements that influence organisational identities, cultures and climates in relation to disclosure of sexual identity in the organisational context.

CHAPTER 3: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY, CLIMATE AND CULTURE AND DISCLOSURE

The right culture can change the art of what is possible in an organisation. ~ Picneur

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, it was argued that the relational development and social exchange theories do not form part of the theoretical foundation of this study and the theories that best suit the focus of this study are symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism. The main argument was based on the alignment of this study with symbolic interactionism, specifically in relation to interaction behaviour and on how gay individuals construct their co-constructed social reality with their colleagues. Based on this co-constructed social reality, it is posited that the gay individuals could decide what communication they may use while opting to avoid disclosure and/or conceal their sexual identity, or what communication is used when their sexual identity is disclosed, whether by themselves or others. It was argued that, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, people assign meaning to their interaction behaviour with others and, therefore, gay individuals will assign meaning to the interaction behaviour they have with their colleagues while opting to avoid disclosure or conceal their sexual identity and also during disclosure. Collectively, these social acts form part of the gay individuals' reality of what it means to disclose their sexual identity in their organisational contexts. Collectively, all the proposed stages of the re-communication conceptual framework, namely – self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and re-communication – will shape the gay individuals' meaning of interacting as gay individuals within their organisational contexts.

It was also extrapolated in Chapter 2 that reality is a social construction and is in a constant state of flux. Consequently, socially constructed reality exists at a given time, based on an individual's personal experiences and social constructions of his/her socially constructed reality at that point in time and the society in which s/he exists. In this study, these personal experiences are those that the gay individuals have of the disclosure of their sexual identity within their organisational contexts. It was acknowledged that socially constructed reality is a jointly constructed understanding of the world, which

means that, in this case, gay individuals would share a co-constructed social reality with each of the colleagues to whom they disclose in their organisational contexts. However, it was posited that the gay individuals' perceptions and their colleagues' perceptions and understanding of gay individuals would not only be influenced by one another, but also by the meaning and symbols of what it means to be gay in a given society and organisations. For example, if a gay individual and/or his/her colleague comes from a society in which being gay involves a capital punishment, then this will influence perceptions and reality. Chapter 2 concluded with postulations on aspects of constructivism that are relevant to this study and in particular, an individual's complexity and/or sophistication of organising, perceiving and interpreting things. These aspects of constructivism related to communication patterns are the most relevant to the purpose of this study and, therefore, they were explored in Chapter 2.

This chapter opens with an explanation of identity in relation to symbolic interactionism and provides an overview of the different types of identities relevant to this study, with a particular focus on two types of identities that are relevant to the purpose of the study. After the history of the notion of identity has been discussed, sexual identity and professional identity as constructs are explored. This discussion includes an overview of the constructs of heteronormativity, in order to provide context to the prevailing ideas shaping the environment in which gay individuals need to function. The explanation of the different types of identities is evidence that, at times, an individual's organisational identity would supersede his/her professional identity. Hence, the discussion on sexual and professional identity is followed by a discussion on the role of identity in the organisational context with the emphasis on organisational identity.

From the explanation of the relevant identities and the discussion of organisational identity, this chapter progresses to an explanation of the concept of disclosure. In order to create a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships, relational development and evolution are explored by means of the social penetration theory, which is applied in terms of disclosure of personal information. The social penetration theory is explored as an application of disclosure of personal information. The reason for this is that it is argued that the social penetration theory supports the explanations of disclosure, in that disclosure is seen as central to and pivotal in the development of relationships. However, it should be noted that, for the most part, disclosure would only take place when an individual feels that s/he can reveal personal information to a given person or within a

given context. The social penetration theory is also used, because it provides context for the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour and employee attitudes within the organisational context. – The social penetration theory demonstrates the way in which social relationships develop from people being strangers to being acquaintances, forming friendships and that individuals are reluctant to disclose sensitive information to individuals with whom they have not developed a close relationship. In order for individuals to be more likely to disclose information, the organisational climates and/or cultures should be more inclusive where individuals feel safe to reveal personal information.

It is important to note that the purpose of the study relates to the possible influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour and, therefore, on co-constructed social reality. In this way, the theoretical foundation is built on the role of interaction behaviour in the social construction of reality. However, the context in which the reality-altering event occurs is an organisational context and, therefore, the focus of the exploration will be on organisational communication in the context of interaction behaviour. Because there are several different types of communication of which the majority fall outside the scope of this study, only those relevant are discussed – interpersonal communication strategies: strategic versus spontaneous communication and informal communication in the organisation.

Within the context of this particular reality-altering event (the disclosure of sexual identity as gay) and the context in which this reality-altering event occurs (the organisational context), the organisational climate and/or culture in which the participants need to function may influence the disclosure experiences and general wellbeing of individuals. Cooperative organisational climates and/or cultures are generally more receptive to inclusion and thus characteristics of cooperative organisational climates and/or cultures are explored. These include constructive and supportive cultures versus defensive cultures, psychologically safe organisations, trust in the organisation and perceived risks of disclosure. Throughout the chapter, there are explications of previous studies that show the link to specific key concepts, such as heteronormativity, professional identity, organisational climate and/or culture, *etc.* in relation to research that influences the disclosure of sexual identity as gay on interpersonal relationships and employee attitudes within the organisational context.

The chapter is subsequently structured in the following main sections: identity in relation to symbolic interaction and disclosure in the organisational context; disclosure of personal information and the social penetration theory; organisational communication; organisational climate and culture; and conclusion.

3.2 Identity in relation to symbolic interactionism and disclosure in the organisational context

Although each individual has various identities, two types of identity are specifically relevant to this study, namely sexual identity and professional identity. Sexual identity is relevant, because it is seen as the identity of individuals being disclosed and professional identity is relevant, because the study is conducted in the organisational context, which is where an individual's professional identity plays a role. It is posited that an individual's sexual identity is part of their personal identity and their professional identity almost stands separately from their personal identity. However, there are times when the two connect or intersect, and in the disclosure of an individual's sexual identity within his/her organisational context, there is a divergence, even if only for a short period. Before these identities are explored in greater depth, a historical background of the concept of identity is provided.

3.2.1 Historical background of identity

The origins of identity as a concept can be traced back to studies on the self in the early 1900s in various disciplines, such as Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology. The term itself only started to be used widely in the 1980s, when identity became part of the vocabulary of social and psychological analysts, both culturally and as a recognised term (Weigert, Teitge & Teitge 1986:1). For years, the concept had been connected with concepts such as the self, character and personality, even though it had not been formally termed as "identity" (Bornman 2004; Vryan, Adler & Adler 2003:367; Weigert *et al* 1986:5, 6). It should be noted that, while the founding symbolic interactionists like Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), who focused on the looking glass self, did not directly use the term "identity" in their exploration of the self, they did lay the groundwork for the use of the term "identity" by later symbolic interactionists.

There are different ways of philosophising about identity, but in symbolic interactionism, the focus is on situational identity. Situational identity refers to a type of identity that people take on that is specific to the face-to-face interactions that individuals have with

one another. The meaning that individuals ascribe to varied experiences develops, shapes and changes their identity and, therefore, the meaning individuals ascribe to their identities can be linked to symbolic interactionism. It is important to note that, similar to reality, where there is not one objective social reality, the same can be said with identity; there is not only one type of identity. Based on this, it is argued that an individual does not have only one identity, but multiple identities, including, but not limited to, a social identity, situational identity, sexual identity and professional identity (Vryan *et al* 2003:367).

Vryan *et al* (2003:368) define three identity types that are conceptualised in a symbolic interactionist framework. These three types of identity are relevant to this study, because of their significance to face-to-face interactions in social settings, as well as their associated link to a symbolic interactionist framework. Table 3.1 provides an explanation of each type of identity.

Table 3.1: Types of identity in a symbolic interactionist framework

Type of Identity	Definition	Example
Situational identity	Situational identities are "…emergent from our joint behaviours and meaning-making during face to face interactions, in the context of socially constructed notions of situationally appropriate roles" (Vryan *et al* 2003:368). In essence, this implies that individuals behave in a manner that would be deemed socially appropriate, depending on the situation or context.	For example, in the organisation (as a professional, an employee, *etc.*), an individual will ensure that his/her behaviour is in accordance with what would be expected in that particular organisational context. When s/he is in a personal role, his/her behaviour may differ from his/her professional one. An example would be not swearing at work, because it is deemed inappropriate in an organisational context, while the same person may swear when s/he is at a braai with friends, because in this context or 'situation' it is not frowned upon.
Social identity	"Our social identities result from identification of us (by self and others) with socially constructed groups or categories of people, or our positions within social	An example of an individual's social identity could be that s/he is a parent, the president of a motorbike club, a church elder, *etc.*

Type of Identity	Definition	Example
	structures" (Vryan *et al* 2003:368).	
Personal identity	*Personal identity* is defined as the way in which "… we construct unique self-narratives, incorporating our particular biographies and aspects of personality associated with us, within given cultural and historical contexts" (Vryan *et al* 2003:368). A personal identity is how an individual personally ascribes meaning based on his/her unique self-narrative. Each individual has his/her own story to tell.	An example of an individual's personal identity is the individual's own personal experience with, for example, a reality-altering event. For example, an individual's personal experience with identifying him/herself as gay. It will be similar when, for example, an individual is a cancer survivor, a rape survivor, a mother. Individuals incorporate these personal narratives as part their personal identity, based on their experiences.

Based on the foregoing explanations, it is key to extrapolate or identify that an individual's identity is always multiple and never singular. Theories such as symbolic interactionism focus on the micro level of identity, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm from which this study should be read. Therefore, this personal and unique individual experience of shaping, forming and developing an individual's identity is critical to the understanding of identity in relation to this study. However, it should be noted that aspects of the macro level of identity (which are related to critical identity theories) do bear some relevance to the argumentation in this study of identity being socially constructed. Examples of these aspects include: individuals construct their identity, based on interactions in various social groups of which they are part (their families, their chosen social groups and/or communities); and socialisation plays a major role in the construction of a person's identity. Therefore, all individuals are affected by the dominant ideologies present in their culture and/or society through the process of socialisation. Although identity formation is individualistic, it is also influenced by the norms and standards of the given society in which the individual exists (Vryan *et al* 2003:368).

Based on the foregoing arguments, it can be concluded that the development of identity is based on an individual's personal experiences and the meaning s/he ascribes to a

given situation. This individualistic experience is influenced by the individual's social construction of his/her reality and co-constructed social reality with others, which is pivotal to the theoretical foundation of this study. Moreover, the aforementioned argument also elucidates that identity is in a constant state of flux, as individuals respond to situations within given contexts.

3.2.2 Sexual orientation versus sexual identity

*Sexual orienta*tion can be defined as an aspect of sexuality that focuses on an individual's concurrent physical, emotional and romantic attraction to either the same sex (homosexual) or the opposite sex (heterosexual) to him/herself or to both sexes (bisexual). This would mean that heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality are all sexual orientations (Coon & Mitterer 2014:370; Sutherland *et al* 2016:9; Human Rights Campaign 2014). Furthermore, Anderson and Taylor (2008:343) and Anderson *et al* (2014:282) explain that sexual orientation is the experience that individuals have when it comes to whom they are attracted and what arouses them sexually – i.e. an individual's attraction to individuals of the same or a different gender. Sexual orientation and sexual preference are often used interchangeably. However, according to Anderson and Taylor (2008:343), gay men and women have argued that using the term "sexual preference" to describe being gay implies that being gay is a choice, which it is not. Therefore, according to Anderson and Taylor (2008:343), the terms should not be used interchangeably and the term "sexual orientation" should be used to describe being gay (Anderson & Taylor 2008:343). Coon and Mitterer (2014:370) concur that sexual orientation is not a choice and, while social, cultural and psychological influences may play a role when individuals explore their sexual orientation, sexual orientation is biological and genetic – not a choice.

As ascertained sexual orientation should not be confused with sexual identity either. Anderson *et al* (2014:284) explain that "… like other forms of social identity, sexual identity is acquired through socialisation and ongoing relationships." Therefore, *sexual identity* refers to an individual's self-recognition of his/her sexual orientation and sexual behaviour and the meaning that s/he ascribes to his/her sexual orientation and behaviour. The distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity is best explained with an example. – A woman may have regular sexual relations with women, because her sexual orientation is that of being attracted to the same sex, but she may not identify herself as being a gay individual and, therefore, she will not have a sexual identity of being gay. Although this woman may have a sexual orientation towards

women, it is only if the woman identifies herself as being gay that her sexual identity would be gay. This lack of identifying herself with her sexual orientation may result from varying reasons, such as fear, denial, choice, *etc.* Although sexual orientation is biological and not a choice, people choose their sexual identity – i.e. whether they want to be known as gay (Anderson *et al* 2014:282, 284; University of Texas Dallas 2019). Moreover, as established in Chapter 1, sexual identity is not as clear-cut as it may be perceived to be: it exists on a continuum and varies from person-to-person.

Based on the three core theoretical approaches applied in the theoretical foundation of the study – symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism – Anderson and Taylor's (2008:343) explanation of the link between identity development and sexual orientation from a social constructionist perspective is relevant. Anderson and Taylor (2008:343) explain that all forms of sexual identity are developed by means of an individual's definition of him/herself and his/her relationships with others. The authors point out that a heterosexual sexual identity is developed from dominant cultural expectations, but sexual identity can evolve, which means that its formation is not linear, but depends on the way in which an individual constructs his/her sexual identity. The construction of sexual identity would be influenced by an individual's experiences, as well as cultural and societal influences. Hence, it is argued that the adoption of a particular sexual identity is not as definitive for some individuals as it may be for others; some individuals will question their sexual identity more and may even oscillate between sexual orientations in an attempt to categorise their sexual identity.

Although part of an individual's sexual identity is his/her sexual behaviour and sexual orientation, sexual identity, in this context, is the overarching term that is used to describe and encompass both sexual orientation and sexual behaviour, but it excludes gender identity. Sexual identity, as defined in Chapter 1, is not explored in depth, because understanding the participant's sexual identity is not part of the purpose or focus of this study. Instead, the focus is on an in-depth understanding of the possible influence of disclosing one's sexual identity as gay on the construction of reality and the way in which this reality-altering event may influence interaction behaviour (communication). Within the context of this study, this communication phenomenon is referred to as "re-communication".

In brief: identity involves who individuals are and how they define themselves; identity is the characteristics that make up an individual. The two most relevant identities in this study are the gay individuals' sexual identity and professional identity. One of the characteristics of the individuals participating in this study is that all of them are gay and have integrated their sexual identity as being gay into their personal identity. As Coon and Mitterer (2014:370) state, "… sexual orientation is a deep part of personal identity and is usually quite stable". However, the emphasis in this study is on how these individuals sexual identity is known by those in their personal lives and, therefore, their sexual identity is included in their personal identity. However, not all of these individuals have disclosed their sexual identity in their professional context and, therefore, their sexual identity is not necessarily included as part of their professional identity.

Although gender studies and queer theory may relate to this study, the constructs of sexual and gender identity are not core to the theoretical foundation or the purpose of this study. This study aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication) – not exploring gender and sexual identity *per se*, or determining why individuals are gay. In other words, gay individuals are used as an example, in order to apply the theoretical principles of the communication phenomenon and re-communication conceptual framework being developed, but any other sample of a reality-altering event could also have been used. Therefore, the focus is not on the discourse of homosexuality and the construction or deconstruction of heteronormativity and social norms, but on the potential influence of disclosure of any reality-altering event on interaction behaviour and the way in which disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity may alter the co-constructed social reality between them and their colleagues. In the next section, a brief overview is provided of heteronormativity to contextualise the dominant environment from which the majority of individuals come from.

3.2.3 Heteronormativity

Robinson (2017) explains, "Heteronormativity is a hegemonic social system of norms, discourses, and practices that construct heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality. Heteronormativity is based on a dichotomous understanding of complementary gender roles, and a belief that sexual relations should be relegated entirely to the private sphere. Homonormativity, then, refers to the belief that sexual minorities can and should conform to heteronormative institutions and more in order to achieve greater acceptance into dominant society".

Heteronormativity is the normalisation of multifaceted aspects such as social, political, cultural and legal, ways of conduct in a particular society. Heteronormativity sets boundaries and limits those who are not heterosexual. Moreover, heteronormativity is directly linked to the norms that maintain the powerbase in hegemonic structures. For the most part, issues around gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class are socially constructed around heteronormativity. The risk of not conforming to the heteronormative practices in a society carries an exclusionary risk that those who are not heteronormative experience daily (Cottingham, Johnson & Taylor 2016:536; Gusmano 2008:474; Giritli Nygren *et al* 2017:418–421; Moreira 2018:15; Rumens 2016:37–39).

Sexuality is understood through heteronormative values. Categorisation of marginalised forces, such as race, ethnicity, and sexual identity, continue to strengthen heteronormative dichotomies. Non-heteronormative practices are often stigmatised, marginalised and minoritised. There is a binary presented in society of heteronormativity as the norm against which all other binaries, such as homosexuality, are judged and measured. The norms and values of a heteronormative society are also carried through into organisational contexts that perpetuate these norms and values and in which gay individuals need to function within these dominantly heteronormative organisational contexts. It is possible that, if an individual goes against a heteronormative frame, "risk" becomes a daily prevalence in that individual's life, because it is measured against a framework of hegemonic heteronormativity. Therefore, in this case, gay individuals will daily be considering the risk of disclosure in a heteronormative frame and heteronormative organisational contexts, which can be considered places where heteronormativity is reproduced. It needs to be noted that individuals in their own perception of the risk they face in disclosing (in this case their sexual identity but it may actually be anything that goes against heteronormative structures) are doing so from the frame of the prevailing structures of power that are part of their reality. From their experiences and perceptions, individuals develop a situated reality of their position in relation to the heteronormative powerbase and act strategically in how they position themselves, in order to reduce their perceived risk. Heterosexual practices are mobilised daily in organisations and organisational cultures are impacted by how well gender-related and sexual identity matters are dealt with in an organisational context (Cottingham, Johnson & Taylor 2016:536; Gusmano 2008:474; Giritli Nygren *et al* 2017:418–421; Moreira 2018:15; Rumens 2016:37–39).

There are multiple examples of and cases in which gay individuals describe their disclosure experiences in heteronormative contexts, which often result in their expressing how they use more caution and/or, in some cases, even opt not to disclose their sexual identity in highly dominantly heteronormative organisational contexts. An example that supports this position, is a phenomenological study conducted by Collins and Rocco (2015:295–296) on the decisions about disclosure of sexual identity that gay law enforcement officers need to make and their experiences in working in what Collins and Rocco (2015:295) term a "masculinised environment". They explain that gay individuals in this context are faced with two choices: to use various forms of communication to either disclose their sexual identity as gay or not to disclose their sexual identity as gay. It was found that if they do disclose their sexual identity to colleagues, they have to address ongoing questions about being gay. The study conducted by Collins and Rocco (2015:295–296) seems to indicate that, when individuals work in a male-dominated and generally heteronormative environment, both gay men and women choose to exercise discretion in the disclosure of their sexual identity. Within these types of contexts, reasons for non-disclosure include, but are not limited to, crude sexual humour and risks and career development concerns (Collins & Rocco 2015:296). Giritli Nygren *et al* (2017:418–421), who concur with the position of the previous deductions, conducted research on the risk in the everyday lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals. One of the areas of exploration in this research was linked to the perceived experience of disclosure of gay individuals to colleagues in heteronormative organisational contexts. The findings illustrate that gay individuals found that, in heteronormative organisational contexts, they may be judged in accordance with heteronormativity and what is considered a norm in terms of heteronormativity.

Another point to consider is that language within heteronormative contexts is grounded from within a heteronormative frame of reference and based on heteronormative values and beliefs. There is also evidence of heteronormative language being derogatory – even vicious – at times towards gay individuals, particularly when it involves perceived "homophobic" slurs. Language that is more sensitive or inclusive to individuals from the LGBTQ communities allows for more inclusive environments (King 2016:18, 22).

3.2.4 Professional identity

Barker-Caza and Creary (2016:260) define *professional identity* as "an important cognitive mechanism that affects workers' attitudes, affect and behaviour in work settings and beyond". Similar to all other identities, a professional identity is based on how an individual uniquely characterises and defines his/her identity in the professional context. It is argued that influences from an individual's micro, meso, macro and exo-environment will influence his/her formation of an identity. A professional identity is continually developed and in flux, because it is based on an individual's experience, but also his/her abilities, skills, understanding and representation of his/her chosen profession. An individual's personal and professional experiences, the way s/he acts out and perceives these experiences, and the way an individual identifies with his/her profession in the form of his/her career, will collectively form his/her professional identity, along with the views s/he shares with colleagues in the same profession (Barker-Caza & Creary 2016:260–262; Moss, Gibson & Dollarhide 2014:3; Sutherland & Markauskaite 2012:748).

Furthermore, Shoulders and Myers (2011:99) posit that professional identity is two-fold. Firstly, it entails how individuals see themselves individually in relation to their chosen career and, secondly, how they see themselves in terms of their professional group at large. Every society consists of dominant representations of all aspects of that society and, in turn, these dominant representations lead to the creation of co-constructed social realities between individuals in a given society. The individuals in that society cooperate within these co-constructed social realities and dominant representations to a greater or lesser degree. It is by means of these dominant representations and co-constructed social realities that individuals form their identity and their own individual perceptions of society and themselves (Shoulders & Myers 2011:101). Moss *et al* (2014:3) continue that the professional identity itself is influenced by society and professional bodies or organisations that relate to that specific profession, and that a professional identity encompasses various aspects in the development and growth in an individual's specific professional context. Personal attributes and professional training also make up an individual's professional identity.

Since a professional identity is a construct, it is a flexible interpretation and understanding of how an individual perceives his/her reality. This is known as the internal dimension, characterised by what an individual personally holds important for his/her professional identity, e.g. individual values, competencies and characteristics in relation

to his/her profession. In juxtaposition, the external dimension is related to how the individual views his/her professional identity in relation to society and his/her profession on a broader scale (Fredriksson & Johansson 2014:587; Nygren & Stigbrand 2014). According to Fredriksson and Johansson (2014:587), the construct of a professional identity is inexplicably linked to norms, practices and statuses as follows: (i) a professional ideology, (ii) organisational belonging, and (iii) the individual's social position.

A professional ideology encompasses norms, values and ideas and, in this context, both the individual's and society's norms, values and ideas about a given profession. These professional ideologies become a frame of reference for the individual in his/her professional identity and aid the individual in the creation of meaning related to his/her work. This assertion of Fredriksson and Johansson (2014:587) about professional ideology directly aligns with symbolic interactionism in terms of frames of reference influencing the meaning individuals' ascribe to their reality and meaning being based on an individual's experience and unique perception that will be infused into all aspects of his/her reality.

Sutherland and Markauskaite (2012:749) provide an alternative definition to professional identity by stating that the intrapersonal component of identity represents an individual's perception of him/herself in the context of his/her profession. By means of their internalised communication, people perceive the "self" in relation to their profession and others in that profession. The individual's professional identity develops and forms, based on the individual's personal attributes and as the growth of his/her knowledge and skills in his/her profession. The internalisation of these professional skills often take place via interpersonal interaction and, in this way, the development of an individual's professional identity is dependent on interpersonal communication.

Part of an individual's professional identity is professionalism and the way in which s/he interacts with colleagues. If, for example, an individual does not wish to communicate with someone in his/her personal life or social context for whatever the reason, s/he can end this relationship and communication. Yet, within the organisational context, an individual has no option but to communicate with colleagues and maintain professional relationships by conducting him/herself in a professional manner, in order to garner respect and recognition in his/her chosen profession and an organisation. Mizzi

(2013:1602, 1604) explains that the concept of professionalism is generally understood to be a discourse that outlines normative values within an organisation to mediate behaviour and conduct and to set parameters of what is considered right and wrong in work relations, in order to sustain and promote respectful and cooperative organisational climates and/or cultures. Therefore, professionalism encompasses an individual's professional identity as well as a sense of self.

Mizzi (2013:1604) argues that professionalism, which is based on heteronormative values, is often open to interpretation. Hence, there will be guidelines as to what constitutes professionalism, but individuals would be allowed to form a professional identity, based on their own assumptions and beliefs. In other words, although there may be guidelines as to what is considered appropriate language and behaviour or actions, individuals and social groups within a professional context in an organisation can still bring in their own attitudes and beliefs, which are part of their personal identity. However, their personal identity should not supersede their professional identity, because part of being professional, is having respect for other people and treating colleagues fairly, which implies, if someone discriminates against gay individuals in the organisational context it could be considered as behaving unprofessionally. Moreover, if these attitudes and beliefs are positioned from a heteronormative perspective, then gay individuals may be marginalised or there may occur incidents of homophobic behaviour. Mizzi (2013:1606, 1613–1614) further explains that, in some cases, professionalism is implied, in order to create safe spaces for gay individuals to reveal their sexual identity, because an individual would have to put their religious beliefs, prejudices and personal feelings aside within their organisational context to maintain a sense of professionalism. However, in some cases, values govern professionalism and who determines if someone is or is not professional are heteronormative, which is when gay individuals may opt for non-disclosure, because they may be discriminated against. It can be argued that organisations that do not create inclusive and constructive cultures and supportive climates are unprofessional, but this form of unprofessional behaviour (such as discrimination against gay individuals) is not addressed, because individuals live in heteronormative societies.

Based on the explanation of the two identities relevant to this study, it is important to gain a critical and deeper understanding of the role of identity in the organisational context. As indicated, sometimes an organisational identity will supersede an individual's professional identity and, therefore, it is posited that an understanding of the

organisational identity is important. Fredriksson and Johansson (2014:587) state, “Organizational identification is often stronger than professional identification, and therefore organizational ideals tend to be promoted more often than professional ideals”. From this quote, it can be extrapolated that organisational identity could supersede professional identity, because the values and ideals of the organisation could be so strong that an individual may put these above his/her professional identity. An example of this could be a journalist working as an academic in an educational organisation with a strong organisational identity as an academic institution. Therefore, this person may identify more strongly with the organisational identity of being an academic than with his/her professional identity of being a trained journalist.

3.2.5 The role of identity in an organisational context: organisational identity

Rostosky and Riggle (2002:411) postulate that the disclosure and integration of sexual identity into any social role – in this case, the social role of an employee – is a highly significant part of gay individuals’ identity formation and development and it directly impacts on gay individuals’ psychosocial adjustment and general psychological wellbeing. In order to ensure employee support, loyalty and identification within the organisation, a strong organisational identity is pivotal. De Ridder (2004:20–21) maintains that organisational contexts require employee support, in order to implement the organisational strategic goals. This support happens in two ways: firstly, through commitment to the organisation, and secondly, through trust in management. Both these are fostered through positive internal organisational communication. In order to gain commitment, task-related communication is important, which is not the type of communication that is relevant or within the scope of this study. However, what is relevant to this type of study is non-task related communication within organisations, which relates to gaining trust. Therefore, organisational communication can be seen to having two goals. The first goal would be to inform employees about all aspects dealing with policy, procedures and tasks, which is termed *task-related comm*unication. The second goal of organisational communication is linked to the social aspect of communication and that is to create a community or a community spirit (De Ridder 2004:20–21; Elving 2005:131–132). This community or community spirit aligns with an individual’s need to categorise him/herself into a specific social group and, in this case, it would be the organisational group. This is not only about the need of an individual to have a social identity, but also links to an individual’s personal identity, where s/he would

compare him/herself to others and benchmark against social norms, as well as a co-constructed social reality with other colleagues, based on his/her social and organisational identity.

Organisational identity is made up of all the perspectives of all of the employees in a specific organisation and its culture and is further linked to each individual's sense of belonging within an organisation. The degree to which each individual within an organisation identifies with the organisation and that s/he feels part of the organisation will collectively make up the organisational identity, as it is being referred to within this context. The stronger the individual identifies with the organisation, the more synergy there will be between his/her personal identity and professional identity. Therefore, organisational identity constitutes the link between the way that an individual defines his/her personal identity and the way that s/he defines the organisational identity. In this way, it is a cognitive link or overlap between the definition of self and the definition of the organisation. The closer these two are aligned, the stronger the individual will identify with the organisation. Trust is a critical attribute of organisational identity and strengthening organisational identity may lead to a sense of shared meaning of what this organisational identity is and create more trusting relationships between the employee and the employer (Moeng 2010; Pate, Beaumont & Pryce 2009:319–325; Puusa & Tolvanen 2006). As established in Chapter 2, shared meaning is pivotal to multiple aspects of symbolic interactionism.

Although organisational identity is frequently used, there seems to have been a shift from referring to organisational identity to professional identity. There are many reasons for this shift, but the dominant reason is that, in contemporary society, tenure and loyalty to a specific organisation on an enduring basis has declined; there is far more mobility in individuals' careers between organisations. The implication is that the enduring relationship with which individuals identify is no longer with a specific organisation, but with a particular profession (Moeng 2010; Pate *et al* 2009:319–325; Puusa & Tolvanen 2006). However, in terms of organisational belonging, Fredriksson and Johansson's (2014:587) position that the organisational identity in which an individual is ensconced can supersede a professional identity, because the values and ideals of the organisation are so strong that an individual may put these above his/her professional identity. Therefore, both organisational and professional identity should be seen as important.

Now that the different identities have been explained, it becomes pivotal to understand the concept of disclosure of personal information – particularly disclosure within an organisational context.

3.3 Disclosure of personal information and the social penetration theory

3.3.1 The concept of disclosure

Before an analysis can be conducted into how and/or if the reality-altering event of disclosure influences interaction behaviour between colleagues, the concept of disclosure should be explored. Disclosure refers to the willingness of a person to share information, which s/he considers personal, intentionally with another individual. Therefore, disclosure is not coerced, but a voluntary exchange of personal information. Thoughts, beliefs and feelings are communicated from one person to another. An important aspect of disclosure is reciprocity and a mutual exchange, because disclosure also involves an individual's willingness to be in a position of vulnerability (Barak & Gluck-Ofri 2007:407–408; Cheung *et al* 2015:279–282; Cho 2007:339; Detenber *et al* 2008; Dietz-Uhler *et al* 2005:115; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:238; Lee *et al* 2013:414; Tardy & Dindia 2018:229; Zang, You & Wang 2015:49, 54).

As a form of communication, disclosure is part of an interpersonal process. It is a unique experience for each individual and each individual ascribes his/her own meaning to disclosure. As individualistic as the interpretation of the experience is, for social scientists, disclosure is a social exchange process, because it occurs between two or more individuals. In addition, individuals consider the costs and benefits of disclosing each time before they do so in any context, including an organisational context (Barak & Gluck-Ofri 2007:407–408; Cheung *et al* 2015:279–282; Cho 2007:339; Detenber *et al* 2008; Dietz-Uhler *et al* 2005:115; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:238; Lee *et al* 2013:414; Tardy & Dindia 2018:229; Zang *et al* 2015:49, 54).

What can be deduced from the previous definitions is that disclosure is the intentional and willing sharing of personal information on a voluntary basis. An example of such personal information being shared willingly would be an individual's sexual identity and it is argued that it is possible that such disclosure is pivotal in the development and sustainability of relationships. This disclosure, it is posited, may add either positively or

negatively to a relationship. Disclosure does not always have to be as sensitive as disclosure of a sexual identity. As explained by Detenber *et al* (2008), disclosure can occur in everyday conversation. What differentiates the intensity of disclosure is the amount of information disclosed and the level of intimacy and depth of the disclosure. Either way, disclosure is a critical aspect of relationship formation. This deduction aligns with what Vitak (2012:453) argues, namely, that relationships are maintained through disclosure.

Furthermore, Dietz-Uhler *et al* (2005:115) explain that disclosure can be risky to an individual's self-esteem, because, if personal information is disclosed and the response is not favourable, it may affect the person in a negative way. If the disclosure results in a negative experience, future disclosure may be reduced significantly. It may even lead to the ending of a relationship. The fear of disclosing one's sexual identity because of the associated risks involved is discussed next. It should be noted that disclosure will only be of value, if the disclosure is appropriate and happens at the right time and in the right way within the right context (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:243).

Because disclosure is central to relationship formation, because relationships are developed by means of the exchange of personal information. Disclosure of personal information plays a role in developing and sustaining relationships, including work relationships (Cheung *et al* 2015:279-282; Detenber *et al* 2008; Dietz-Uhler *et al* 2005:115; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:243; Littlejohn 1999:259–262; Tardy & Dindia 2018:229–230; Zang & Huang 2012; Vitak 2012:453).

According to Tardy and Dindia (2018:241–249), there are aspects that can encourage or discourage an individual from disclosing information within an organisational context. On the one hand, factors that can discourage disclosure in the organisational context include certain organisational norms and/or practices. There may be legal constraints and restrictive organisational ideologies that are limiting to disclosure. On the other hand, reciprocal behaviour can be considered a factor that encourages disclosure. "Self-disclosures can have functional and dysfunctional effects for organisations, and the people in them" (Tardy & Dindia 2018:246).

Although the relational development and social exchange theories do not form part of the theoretical foundation of this study, the social penetration theory is explored as an

application of disclosure, because this theory supports the explanations of disclosure and is central to relationship development. In the social penetration theory, it is purported that disclosure takes place at different levels, depending on the relationship, but it generally takes place when an individual feels secure enough to reveal personal information to a particular person within a specific context. The context of this study is the organisational context and the revelation of information occurs between a gay individual and his/her colleagues around the disclosure of the gay individual's sexual identity. Individuals are more willing to disclose in environments where they feel safe to reveal personal information and, therefore, it is argued that the organisational contexts that are perceived safer and more inclusive often encourage disclosure.

3.3.2 Social penetration theory as an application of disclosure

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Arnold Taylor developed the social penetration theory in the 1970s. The social penetration theory analyses "… events which occur as social relationships progress from the level of strangers to those of casual acquaintances, close friends and beyond" (Altman & Taylor 1973:3). The framework focuses on three factors that play a role in encouraging or discouraging the growth of interpersonal relationships: (i) people's personal characteristics; (ii) outcomes of exchange, which involves people liking each other or feeling they can gain from the relationship; and (iii) situational context, which is the development of social bonds (Altman & Taylor 1973:4). In the social penetration theory, relationship development predominantly occurs through self-disclosure.

In this context, social penetration is the interpersonal behaviours that take place in social interaction coupled with internal subjective processes where individuals form a subjective view of another individual, including his/her perceptions, feelings, likes and dislikes of this other individual. The behaviours and internal processes afford an individual the opportunity to obtain a holistic view of someone, which influences how open or closed an individual will be with someone. However, it is noted that the social penetration process is gradual and occurs over time and in stages. As discussed later in this chapter, the interpersonal aspects of a developing relationship will progress from more superficial interactions and engagements to more intimate interactions and engagements in stages (Altman & Taylor 1973:5–6).

The re-communication conceptual framework was developed to understand the relationship between individuals; to provide insight into the way in which interpersonal

relationships evolve over time; and to understand the role that disclosure plays in this process. Social penetration proceeds through stages and over time. The framework shows the gradual formation and development of a relationship and the way in which interpersonal communication moves from a superficial level of communication, which is not intimate, to a deeper and more meaningful interaction. The social penetration theory focuses on the evolution of interpersonal relationships and it illustrates how, based on individuals' revelations about what they think, feel and say to one another, impacts the way in which an interpersonal relationship transforms from a superficial level of engagement to a deeper level of intimacy. This journey from less to more intimate communication is depicted in layers, starting with the most baseline biographical penetration of information about an individual and slowly penetrating other aspects of the personality of an individual, with the ultimate aim of reaching a person's core and understanding them and engaging with them at the deepest level. The core layer is where the innermost fears and self-concept of an individual resides. Each time that personal information is disclosed, an individual needs to evaluate the cost or risk that may come with the disclosure (in this case the risk of damaging interpersonal communication and relationships with colleagues), as well as the associated rewards that may result from disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973:3–7; Ayres 1979:192; Baak, Fogliasso & Harris 2000:40; Pan & Lieber 2008:32–33).

In the social penetration theory, there is a link between disclosure and reinforcement dynamics. In other words, if individuals receive positive reinforcement from revealing aspects of themselves, they may be more open to reveal significant information about themselves over time (Baak *et al* 2000:39–40). In this study, the link between disclosure and reinforcement dynamics is relevant in two ways. Firstly, if gay individuals' experiences of the disclosure of their sexual identity to a colleague results in positive experiences, the disclosure is likely to be experienced in a positive way, and, based on these experiences, they will be more willing to disclose their sexual identity to other colleagues. Secondly, if gay individuals have had positive interactions with colleagues subsequent to the disclosure and the gay individuals and their colleagues continue to have a constructive relationship, it may act as a form of positive reinforcement, which could make the gay individuals feel less vulnerable and, therefore, more comfortable to disclose other significant personal information to these or other colleagues.

As time passes, layers of an individual's personality are penetrated, if the interpersonal relationship develops and/or depenetrated, if the relationship does not continue to develop. This is why the social penetration theory is often referred to as the "onion theory" (Baak *et al,* 2000:40; Zang & Huang 2012; Wood, 2004:200–201). Similar to the layers of an onion, people are proposed to be peeling away layers through disclosure, with the ultimate aim of getting to the other person's core. The social penetration theory proposes that, like an onion, an individual has multiple layers that need to be penetrated, in order to get to the core of an individual's personality. An individual's values, attitudes and beliefs are revealed layer-by-layer, as the intimacy in a relationship develops. Wood (2004:201) explains that simplistically, the naming implies that firstly, the outer superficial layers of a relationship and an individual's personality are explored. When this part of the relationship has been established, then the middle and inner layers are explored and finally, a relationship between two individuals will get to the core of an individual. The core personality, as was indicated already, is where the innermost fears and self-concept of an individual are situated. Individuals may use their outer layers at any given time to conceal some of their inner layers or to support them. For example, a gay person may not want to use communication strategies to disclose immediately to colleagues that s/he is gay and may, therefore, keep colleagues at a distance or avoid telling colleagues by using communication strategies to ensure that the inner layer about this gay individual's sexual identity remains concealed.

Not all relationships get to the point where individuals penetrate each other's inner core, particularly not within a professional context. In professional contexts, the relationship may remain at a superficial or intermediate level, but when something of a personal nature is disclosed, it does provide colleagues with insights into that individual's core. Hence, while work relationships may not often get to the point of colleagues penetrating to the core of an individual, the act of disclosure of a sexual identity provides insights into the gay individual's core for his/her colleagues and, therefore, carries great risk for the gay individual. The risk factors that gay individuals' have experienced when disclosing their sexual identity within their organisational contexts are explored in a later section of this chapter.

Within the social penetration theory, "the process of self-revelation is influenced by three major factors, which are personal characteristics, reward/cost assessments, and the situational context" (Baak *et al* 2000:40). These factors are discussed in the following sections.

3.3.2.1 Personal characteristics

An individual's personal characteristics such as "…biographical properties, personality features and social need characteristics' influence how an individual's interpersonal affairs are managed" (Altman & Taylor 1973:4). Baak *et al* (2000:40, 42) state that an individual has what is deemed to be "breadth categories", which illicit certain beliefs in the individual. Breadth categories include, but are not limited to, views on religion, politics, sport, work ethic, moral beliefs, *etc.* Each breadth category has a breadth frequency, which indicates how deep and intimate the thoughts and views of the individual are in relation to something. An individual may have superficial views and, therefore, a shallow breadth frequency on sport, while having very specific views and beliefs and a depth of ideas on religion, which would elicit a deep and intimate breadth frequency. If work were a central interest in an individual's life, then s/he would have what is termed in the social penetration theory a high frequency breadth regarding work. This high frequency breadth about work would mean that someone would have particularly strong beliefs, views and values in relation to things such as work ethics and his/her role within the organisation, *etc.* In this way, a gay individual with a high breadth frequency in terms of his/her work would possibly find the disclosure of his/her sexual identity more stressful than someone with a low breadth frequency towards the importance of work. S/he would contemplate the risks of disclosure more and the reactions of colleagues would affect him/her more than they would a colleague with a low breadth frequency in relation to work. If, for example, work is only a source of income for the individual, then s/he may have a shallow breadth frequency regarding work. Individuals usually take the longest time to reveal their deepest breadth frequencies: they tend to keep them hidden, until they believe that the risk factor of disclosure is significantly low and they know the individual to whom they are disclosing better and trust him/her more. Pan and Lieber (2008:34) state that the findings of research in the use of the social penetration theory indicate that individuals derive satisfaction through gaining and revealing private information, even though it places them in a vulnerable position. Therefore, it can be argued that disclosure is one of the key factors that leads to satisfaction in personal relationships.

3.3.2.2 Outcomes of exchange

If an individual has positive encounters with someone, likes the individual or feels that s/he will gain something from forming a relationship with him/her, then s/he would have a different history with this individual than with an individual with whom s/he has had

negative encounters. This type of an experience would fall within the ambit of outcomes of exchange, some exchanges will be satisfactory, some unsatisfactory and some exchanges will be a positive outcome of exchange and some negative ones (Altman & Taylor 1973:4).

3.3.2.3 Reward/cost assessments

One of the key factors in contemplating disclosure of personal information that an individual takes into account is the costs versus the rewards that the disclosure may illicit. By means of his/her own unique calculation, the individual would estimate what value or risk the disclosure should bring to the relationship. This cannot be something known for sure, because people will respond differently, based on their unique experiences, views, beliefs, *etc.* The risk and value calculation is highly subjective and individualistic, because value is relative. Baak *et al* (2000:41) state, "… rewards and costs are assessed and based on current or immediate interaction, expectations concerning future interactions, and cumulative valuations of past involvements". Pan and Lieber (2008:33) argue that individuals will assess costs and rewards to determine if further penetration (from the individual enquiring) and revelation (from the individual revealing) will be of value. As the individual's breadth frequency increases, so do the value and importance of that relationship and, therefore, the risk related to costs and rewards becomes higher, because the outcome is more valuable, because the relationship is more valuable. Weighing up cost and reward of disclosure would be a form of interpersonal economy that individuals use to weigh up the benefits of a relationship and revealing information.

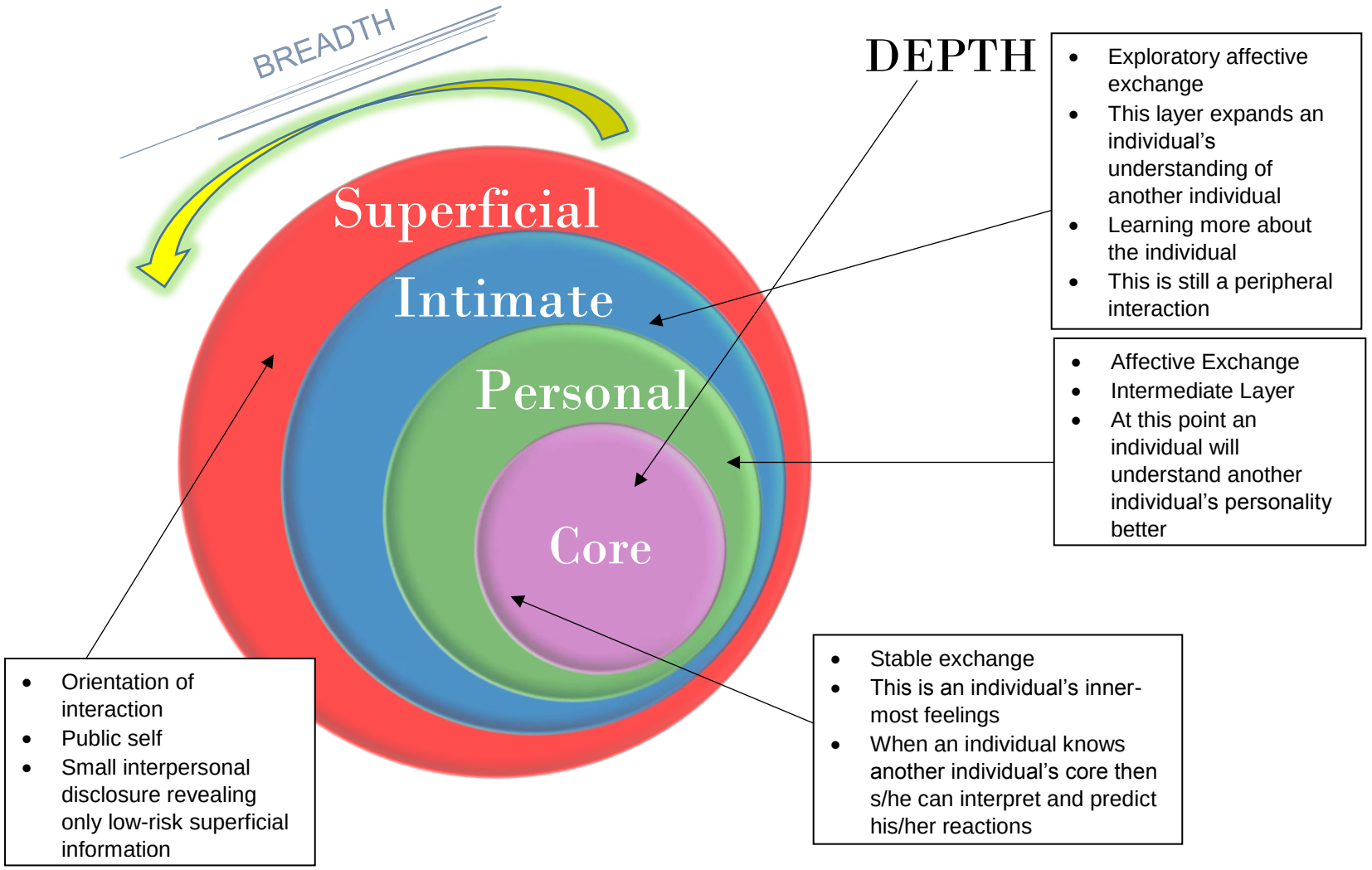
3.3.2.4 Situational context

"Development of social bonds takes place within an environmental or situational context. In some cases, people can voluntarily enter and leave a relationship; in other instances, they may be forced to maintain a tie with another person. These and other situational processes can have considerable impact on the history of an interpersonal encounter" (Altman & Taylor 1973:4). As established earlier, the outer layers that are more superficial in nature are generally revealed quicker than those that are considered more intimate. Baak *et al* (2000:41–42) observe that, in most cases, the initial stages of revealing information will set the precedent of what is to come in a relationship or interaction. If a revelation leads to a negative outcome, the individual would possibly deem the risk too high and be reluctant to reveal the same information in the future. There are individuals who reveal intimate information far quicker than others do and the

social penetration theory refers to these individuals as high/over-revealers. High/over-revealers reveal too much too soon and do not know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate disclosures. Low/under revealers, on the other hand, take far longer to disclose and tend to avoid disclosing anything to anyone, not even superficial information.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the researcher's personal conceptualisation of the "onion" of the social penetration theory, based on the previous sources.

Figure 3.1: Researcher's personal conceptualisation of the social penetration theory's "onion" based on the previous sources



3.4 Organisational communication

Every aspect of an organisation involves communication, and communication is required to fulfil all aspects and functions of organisations. Communication within an organisation involves the flow of all information, all brand assets, coupled with employees' perceptions and understanding of the organisation. All organisations require individuals to interact and all administrative, operational and managerial functions utilise direct and indirect forms of communication. Organisational communication also includes the strategies and tools that all employees use in their official and unofficial communication. However, in the context of this study, the focus of organisational communication is not on these aspects of organisational communication, but rather on informal interaction behaviour in the organisation between employees. There are two different channels of communication within the organisational context: formal and informal communication (Cacciattolo 2015:83; Markovic & Salamzadeh 2018:22; Nwogbaga *et al* 2015; Singh 2014:36). The relevant types of communication to this study are informal communication, particularly interaction behaviour and grapevine communication, individuals' interpersonal communication strategies, as well as spontaneous forms of communication. Only these types of communication are considered in this study.

As Hynes (2012:466) explicates, organisational communication is critical, because "companies that recognize the relationship between employee engagement and business success will seek ways to foster and facilitate workers' well-being." De Kay (2012:449) concurs regarding the importance and significance of interpersonal communication in the organisation.

It should be noted that this study does not focus on organisational communication *per se*. As argued in Chapter 1, there are multiple dimensions in organisational communication and the disclosure of information within an individual's organisational context and interaction behaviour between colleagues would make up just one dimension of internal organisational communication. Similar to organisational communication, interpersonal communication also has several dimensions. The emphasis of this study is on one particular aspect of interpersonal communication –how disclosure of a reality-altering event may influence interaction behaviour between colleagues. Although theories of interpersonal communication, organisational communication, perception theories, social exchange theories and theories of relational

development were considered, these theories and perspectives were deemed unsuitable to the underlying focus of this study of reality-altering events, symbolic meaning, co-constructed social reality and this specific type of interaction behaviour. Therefore, they have not been included in the study.

Within the organisational context, it is recognised that individuals are continuously engaged in various forms of interpersonal communication with colleagues. At times, this interpersonal communication between colleagues may be planned and goal-orientated, and thus strategic in nature. At other times and during other engagements, the communication may be more spontaneous. The next section elucidates on these two types of interpersonal communication.

3.4.1 Interpersonal communication: strategic versus spontaneous communication

Individuals interact interpersonally with one another in the organisation and that is how they experience their interaction behaviour with colleagues. Interaction behaviour may influence how individuals feel about the organisational contexts in which they function. Effective communication is an essential skill and critical to the success of every organisation, because with more open and clear communication, there will be fewer misunderstandings in the organisation. Interpersonal communication needs to be managed effectively, in order to accomplish the organisational goals. However, for the purpose of this study, the organisational goals were not considered a priority. Instead, the focus is on how interpersonal communication influences relationships between colleagues and the organisational climate and/or culture. It is posited that, if communication is not clear in the organisation, it may lead to, amongst other things, a breakdown in relationships, stress, miscommunication and misunderstandings, which may affect productivity and goals being met and lead to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships and interaction behaviour. When employees know and understand the organisation and their individual priorities, they will generally be more productive (Mcintosh & Luecke 2008:3–5; Ruben & Gigliotti 2017:12; Okoro, Washington & Thomas 2017:28-32; Singh 2014:36–37; Turaga 2016:56, 64).

The etymology of the word “communication” comes from the Latin *communicare,* which means, “to share”’ and “be in relation with”. It can also mean, “bringing together”. The etymology of communication lends itself to the description of interpersonal

communication, in that interpersonal communication can be described as the transaction and interaction between two or more individuals that materialises through language and discourse. Interpersonal communication differs, based on the relationships individuals have with one another. The earliest research into interpersonal communication was conducted in the 1950s, but it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that research into interpersonal communication began in earnest. It was during this time that the realisation came to fruition that most communication occurs in small groups and dyads (Cobley & Schulz 2013:1; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:3; Guerrero, Andersen & Afifi 2018:3–4; Littlejohn & Foss 2008:147; Steinberg 2007:140–141; Tubbs & Moss 2008:19; Wood 2004:9). Diggs-Brown (2012:178) adds that interpersonal communication has a more focused context than other communication contexts, because it allows for more spontaneous content than more planned communication types, such as mass communication, and it allows for changes in focus, direction and input. Du Plooy-Cilliers and Louw (2014:3–4) posit that the sharing of meaning is the key to the messages shared within the exchange between people.

The exchange aspect of communication is the reason for interpersonal communication being termed transactional. Individuals always communicate with a purpose and in a non-static way, because their frame of mind, past experiences and the things considered to be significant symbols (as defined in Chapter 2), among other things, influence communication. The definition of interpersonal communication proposed by Du Plooy-Cilliers and Louw (2014:3) aligns with the purpose of this study, namely that it is "a functional, dynamic and transactional process where two or more individuals deliberately try to create and share meaning by sending and interpreting verbal and non-verbal messages." The selection of this definition is based on the argument of disclosure and the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour and co-constructed social reality within the organisational context being at the core of the purpose of this study.

According to Singh (2014:37), there are four basic principles to interpersonal communication that aid in increasing organisational effectiveness: it is inescapable, irreversible, complicated and contextual, implying that communication is context-specific and does not occur in isolation. Therefore, interpersonal communication is the process of information transmission from one individual to another. Interpersonal communication is an essential aspect of organisational success, in that it can be an effective tool for motivating employees within an organisation. In order to be considered focused and

effective within the organisational context to ensure improved commitment, productivity and organisational performance, interpersonal communication should be open and direct (Naumovski, Dana, Pesakovic & Fidanoski 2016; Singh 2014:36–38).

Henceforth, it is relevant to understand why interpersonal communication and positive interpersonal relationships after disclosure of a sexual identity within the organisation is important, in order to establish how the disclosure of a reality-altering event may influence interaction behaviour with colleagues. Based on the previous argument, it can be inferred that, when a gay individual discloses his/her sexual identity within his/her organisational context and the organisational identity, climate and/or culture supports this disclosure, then the gay individual is more likely to disclose. The gay individual is also more likely to feel more loyal to the company, have a more positive attitude towards work matters and a sound mental wellbeing in the organisation and experience more job satisfaction.

The findings and data analysis of the study that Collins and Rocco (2015:301–309) conducted on the disclosure of sexual identity within the law-enforcement context (mentioned earlier in this chapter) support the afore-mentioned position of the importance of understanding why interpersonal communication and positive interpersonal relationships after disclosure of a sexual identity within an organisation is important. – Such an understanding makes it possible to establish how the disclosure of a reality-altering event may influence interaction behaviour with colleagues. In this study, possible themes are extrapolated regarding the perceptions of gay individuals of how disclosure in the organisational context alters their interpersonal relationships with colleagues. These themes, based on the Collins and Rocco (2015:301–309) research, were further explored in the semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in this study.

The dominant themes in the study of Collins and Rocco (2015:301–309) include:

- There are rules of engagement in the way gay individuals are expected to communicate after disclosure of their sexual identity. These include, but are not limited to, the fact that it is perceived that gay individuals should not disclose too much information about their personal lives to colleagues, because it may make them uncomfortable and, if they adhere to these rules of engagement, they will not be ostracised. For example, there are different communication standards for

heterosexual men than there are for gay men in law enforcement. Whereas gay men have to avoid communication about their family or personal lives, the same is not expected of heterosexual men. This, however, inhibits spontaneous communication.

- Speech and language play an important role in organisational engagements, as heterosexual colleagues often use derogatory language about gay individuals.
- Gay individuals are of the opinion that, because of their sexual identity, their job safety and security are not guaranteed, not even if their performance is satisfactory.
- Gay individuals feel that their gayness is singled out above any of their other personal characteristics in the organisation.
- Those individuals, who choose not to disclose their sexual identity, experience stress because of having to conceal their sexual identity in the organisation.
- Gay individuals in law enforcement environments feel that they often have to prove their professionalism to others.
- Having experienced being marginalised, gay individuals in this context are generally more empathetic towards other colleagues.
- The perception of the gay participants were that they have to be extra confident, professional and level headed, even in difficult circumstances, so that they are not discriminated against for being gay.
- Some gay individuals in this study pointed out that, if they have had bad experiences in the past with disclosing their sexual identity, then they are reluctant to disclose their sexual identity in future, even if they are currently working in a more accepting department.

The afore-mentioned study alludes to the fact that gay individuals – particularly in environments that are not supportive of disclosure of personal information – need to be more cautious and have to plan how they disclose information, in what way and what type of information they can and/or cannot share, thereby implying that they use more forms of strategic communication. In the interpersonal context, strategic communication is often argued in relation to its counterpart, which is spontaneous communication, which is authentic and open in nature. Strategic communication in the interpersonal context is contrived, premeditated, calculated, forced, unspontaneous and usually planned and, in extreme cases, even show elements of deception and manipulation built into the communication. Strategic communication is a deliberate and carefully planned way of communicating and is often explained as communication with a highly specific agenda and a specific motive (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2009:226–227; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw

2014:10; Wood 2006:228). In this study, it is argued that, if individuals do not feel psychologically safe, they will possibly use strategic communication as part of their avoidance and/or concealment communication strategies (termed self-preservation strategies). Conversely, if they do feel safe to be open about their sexual identity, they will communicate spontaneously.

In the organisational context, spontaneous and strategic communication may be influenced by the culture of the organisation itself. For example, Ragins and Cornwell (2001:1256) explain that the disclosure of sexual identity to work colleagues is a complex and difficult decision for gay individuals, irrespective of how open they may be about their sexual identity in their personal lives. For example, disclosure will be less likely to take place if a gay individual has observed others disclosing their sexual identity in the organisation and being discriminated against. Conversely, gay individuals working in organisations with other openly gay people are more likely to disclose. However, Ragins and Cornwell (2001:1256) point out that there are varying degrees of disclosure. In some organisational contexts, colleagues may encourage disclosure of a person's sexual identity by means of their seemingly open approach or a seemingly open environment to gay individuals. In environments or around colleagues, who seem to have more negative feelings towards gay individuals, the gay individual may be less willing to disclose his/her sexual identity. This aligns with the assumptions raised in Chapter 1, in that each time the disclosure of sexual identity is in the gay individual's control and s/he does decide to disclose his/her sexual identity to a colleague, s/he will employ either communication strategies and/or more spontaneous forms of communication, depending on the situation. (There are times, when others may disclose the gay individual's sexual identity and then it is not in the gay individual's control).

3.4.2 Informal communication

Informal communication is the unofficial flow of communication within an organisation, generally referred to as "grapevine communication". This is employee-driven communication that is also informal in nature and is generally flexible, spontaneous, interactive and voluntary. Apart from helping colleagues to bond and building organisational communication, informal communication channels will satiate various emotional and social needs. Informal communication is perception-based and is influenced by the way in which an individual perceives the interaction and message.

However, it is important to note that informal communication is also a reflection of the way individuals reflect on and view their organisation. This type of communication is not dependent on an individual's position in an organisation, because informal communication does not have any rules of combination and engagement can, therefore, happen at all levels of an organisation. Grapevine communication primarily flows through an organisation via word of mouth and spreads rapidly throughout an organisation. Grapevine communication is the primary source of information on social matters and often has a larger impact than formal channels of communication. However, on the negative side, part of grapevine communication also includes rumour and gossip and grapevine communication is often responsible for making individuals feel vulnerable and threatened (Alparslan & Kılınç 2015:115–116; Cacciattolo 2015:83; Enyia & Orokor 2016:37–38; Markovic & Salamzadeh 2018:22–23; Nwogbaga *et al* 2015; Robinson & Thelen 2018).

Enyia and Orokor (2016:37–38) explain the characteristics of informal communication include that it is an uncontrolled form of communication and, therefore, management do not have control over it, the way they do over formal communication. It is a flexible form of communication, although many consider it to be used out of self-interest alone. This aligns with the explanation of Davis (1953:45), who states that, while formal communication is controlled by the chain of command, informal communication is more flexible. Davis (1953:45) conceptualises four types of grapevine communication and explains the ways and patterns of communication flow in grapevine communication chains as follows:

- Single-strand chain – The single strand chain occurs when informal communication is passed on from one person to the next through a line of recipients to the ultimate recipient. This type of chain often distorts and filters information.
- Gossip chain – In the gossip chain, which is also referred to as "the wheel", there is one central person, who seeks out the information and then disseminates it to multiple people.
- Probability chain – The probability chain is a random process in which an individual randomly tells one or two other people and, through the laws of probability, it is assumed that those people would go on to tell others.

- Cluster chain – In the cluster chain, one individual will tell three people something; those three people tell two additional people each; and then each of them will tell another one person.

In this study, it is critical to note that, given that grapevine communication is out of the control of the gay individual and it will always exist within an organisational context, the gay individual has to accept that, at times the disclosure of his/her sexual identity may happen out of his/her control. Unfortunately, grapevine communication can also be in the form of rumours and gossip and, given that most organisational contexts may be heteronormative in nature, it is possible for a gay individual to become part of organisational rumour or gossip.

3.5 Organisational climate and culture

The argument regarding organisational climate and/or culture as positioned for the purposes of this study is that, when an organisational climate and/or culture is not constructive and unsupportive of gay individuals, these individuals would possibly be less likely to disclose their sexual identity in their organisational context. Therefore, this section does not address the creation or dimensions of organisational culture: the emphasis is on the type of organisational cultures and climates that would encourage and/or discourage disclosure and on the way in which positive cultures could possibly contribute towards happier and healthier employees. Hence, the focus in this section is on the differentiation of organisational climate and/or culture, because, although they are conceptually similar, there are subtle differences between the two.

It is important to note that there is a number of theories related to the types and dimensions of organisational climate and/or culture and the seminal authors include Deal and Kennedy, Handy, Schein, Scholtz, Hampden-Turner, Hofstede, O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, Denison, Johnson, Harris, Cameron and Quinn, Cooke, Grant and McGuire. In this study, Edgar Schein's framework of organisational culture, which adopts a functionalist approach, is seen as the prominent framework, because this study does not deal with the way in which organisational climates and cultures are created and/or the different views on organisational culture, but rather on what type of organisational cultures would encourage and/or discourage disclosure. Cooke and Lafferty's (1987) organisational culture inventory is also discussed because of the way in which it groups organisational culture into constructive and defensive cultures. The type of

organisational culture, in turn, is believed to influence disclosure. Apart from these groupings, Schein's levels of organisational culture are also included (Bitsani 2013:49; Ledimo 2015:1749; Onday 2016:39004; Quain, Ambotumah, Yidana & Mensah-Livivnstone 2016:98).

Given that this study focuses on co-constructed social reality, reality-altering events, symbolic interactionism and socially constructed reality as the theoretical foundation, the literature on organisational climate and/or culture only provides the background and context of this study. Organisational culture/climate is not involved in the purpose or in the key concepts of the re-communication conceptual framework developed for the study and neither does it play a role in the identification, explanation and labelling of the phenomenon of re-communication. Therefore, the focus is not on explaining the core theorists and contributors to organisational culture, on framing organisational climate and/or culture as supporting literature for the context. Although some of the concepts from these theories have been integrated in the explanations of organisational climate and culture, a detailed discussion of each theory is outside of the scope of this study.

3.5.1 Organisational climate

Organisational climate is linked to the feeling of individuals towards their organisational context. The climate essentially involves that for which the organisation stands and the positive or negative ambience that is projected by those within the organisation (Ashkanasy & Hartel 2014:136–137; Jex, Sliter & Britton 2014:179–180). Schneider and Barbera (2014a:10) explain that "… organizational climate is the meaning organizational employees attach to the policies, practices, and procedures they experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded, supported, and expected." Organisational climate also has a psychological element to it.

Ehrhart and Raver (2014:158) explain that organisational climate can be understood in two ways: firstly, as a molar climate and secondly as a focused climate. "Molar" refers to the "feel" of the organisation with a focus on employee wellbeing. This is connected to how positively or negatively employees perceive the organisational climate and the way in which they are treated. Focused climates are the way in which messages are sent from within an organisational context to employees about the core imperatives of an organisation, which is either a strategic climate or a process climate. The distinction between these two climates is explored by Ehrhart and Raver (2014:158), who explain that strategic climates specifically address "… the outcomes the organization is trying to

achieve", whereas process climates "… focus on the internal processes that support the achievement of those outcomes".

3.5.2 Organisational culture

Leithy (2017), Onday (2016:39004), Serpa (2016:51) and Zeyada (2018:420) explicate that the term "organisational culture" emerged and started being utilised in 1980 by the specialised press and through a number of scientific publications, including the following: Ouchi's (1981) *Theory Z: How American business can meet the Japanese challenge*, Pascale and Athos' (1982) *The art of Japanese management: applications for American executives*, Deal and Kennedy's (1982) *Corporate cultures: the rites and rituals of corporate life* and Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In search of excellence: lessons from America's best run companies*. These publications catalysed the realisation of the influential role organisational culture plays in the organisation.

Although there is no universal definition of organisational culture, it is that an organisational culture focuses on the fundamental and implicit collection of rituals, beliefs, norms, attitudes and values inclusive of the core characteristics of an organisation, which are shared by the individuals and the collective in a particular organisational context or setting. These organisational beliefs, norms, values and attitudes, which guide the actions and reactions in the organisation, contribute to its culture, while reflecting the way in which employees perceive and interpret the organisational culture (Ahmed & Shafiq 2014:21; Ashkanasy & Hartel 2014:136–137; Ehrhart & Raver 2014:157; Fuller 2015:vii; Jex *et al* 2014:179–180; Keyton 2014:122; Leithy 2017; Larentis, Antonello & Slongo 2017:39, 41; Lo, Mohamad, Ramayah, Abdullah & Lim 2017:808–809, 811; Morcos 2018; Nurchayo, Della, Irawan & Ronaldy 2018:4–5, 9; Odor 2018:31–33, 36; Saad & Abbas 2018:207, 209; Samuel, Rahman, Khairuddin, Uddin & Rahaman 2017:84; Schein 1988; Schneider & Barbera 2014a:10; Zeyada 2018:423).

Schein (1988) identifies the following three levels of organisational culture: (i) the level of artefacts, which is the physical attributes, such as the dress code of an organisation; (ii) the level of values that are conscious and generally linked to strategies, goals and philosophies; and (iii) levels of underlying assumptions, which are the core of an organisational culture and are connected to the organisation's underlying assumptions and values. Although not always conscious, they do explain why things happen the way that they do in an organisation.

Therefore, *organisational culture* is defined as the collective behaviour and collective effect of the common beliefs, behaviour, patterns, rituals, ceremonies, traditions, attitudes, beliefs and underlying values of those internal to the organisation and the employee experience, even in some cases physical attributes, like the dress code of an organisation or artefacts. Organisational culture includes management's decisions, information, stories and rites that are passed from one person to another within an organisational context. The organisational norms, values and beliefs are initially driven by the owner, founder or the first Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the organisation, which then influence the initial policies, practices and processes. It involves the basic rules and conditions, to which employees are orientated, after which the organisational culture is shared within the organisation. Sharing of the organisational culture is often done unconsciously, because, although the organisational culture is a powerful phenomenon, it is, for the most part, invisible.

In alignment with symbolic interactionism, organisational culture involves symbols and meanings. In the context of organisational culture, symbols are used as a representation of, in some cases, social processes and practices, which can be considered cultural. The organisational culture is developed within the organisational context and is transmitted by the socialisation experiences when someone new starts at an organisation. As the organisation develops, it faces internal and external scrutiny and internal integration of these norms, values, beliefs, policies, procedures and practices are internally integrated. This results in the initial organisational culture being either accepted or challenged, after which it is altered, which forms the organisational reality from which the culture is driven (Ahmed & Shafiq 2014:21; Ashkanasy & Hartel 2014:136–137; Ehrhart & Raver 2014:157; Fuller 2015:vii; Jex *et al* 2014:179–180; Keyton 2014:122; Leithy 2017; Larentis *et al* 2017:39, 41; Lo *et al* 2017:808–809, 811; Morcos 2018; Nurchayo *et al* 2018:4–5, 9; Odor 2018: 31–33, 36; Saad & Abbas 2018:207, 209; Samuel *et al* 2017:84; Schein 1988; Schneider & Barbera 2014a:10; Zeyada 2018:423).

Unlike organisational climate, organisational culture is learned and shared, although it is only effective and prevails, if everyone is unified towards the culture. The stability of the organisational culture will determine how integrated it will be. Therefore, organisational culture is an acquired process that is developed by means of interaction between colleagues in the organisation, and is the tangible personality initiated inside every

organisation. Organisational cultures can be both positive and/or negative, but the more positive a culture is, the more it unleashes creativity, innovation, flexibility and a drive to increased achievement. Culture to an organisation is like personality to an individual, because it has both tangible and intangible characteristics.

An organisational culture is a key condition for the effective functioning and success of the organisation, and it will increase organisational effectiveness, performance and actions by increasing satisfaction levels. More importantly, organisational cultures can be utilised to enhance the relationship of organisational effectiveness and influence the behaviour of individuals in the organisation, when they interact with each other and other stakeholders. To this end, organisational culture has influenced and informed much of the work on organisational effectiveness. Organisational culture also has an impact on employee engagement: the more positive the organisational culture, the better the engagement. In this way, organisational culture has a direct impact on the individual and collective performance (Ahmed & Shafiq 2014:21; Ashkanasy & Hartel 2014:136–137; Ehrhart & Raver 2014:157; Fuller 2015:vii; Jex *et al* 2014:179–180; Keyton 2014:122; Leithy 2017; Larentis *et al* 2017:39, 41; Lo *et al* 2017:808–809,811; Morcos, 2018; Nurchayo *et al* 2018:4–5 ,9; Odor 2018:31–33,36; Onday 2016:39004; Saad & Abbas 2018:207, 209; Samuel *et al* 2017:84; Schneider & Barbera 2014a:10; Zeyada 2018:423).

It can be deduced that many of the definitions of organisational culture emphasise cognitive aspects, such as assumptions, beliefs and values, while others focus more on the behaviour within the organisational context (Onday 2016:39004). In summary, the following definition is relevant: “organisational culture is the tacit social order of an organization: It shapes attitudes and behaviors in wide-ranging and durable ways. Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group. When properly aligned with personal values, drives, and needs, culture can unleash tremendous amounts of energy toward a shared purpose and foster an organization’s capacity to thrive” (Groysberg, Lee, Price & Cheng 2018).

3.5.3 Development of organisational climate and culture

“… Organisational climate and culture are inextricably connected, mutually reinforcing, and also reciprocally related. Culture (values, basic assumptions, beliefs) causes climates to emerge through the policies, practices and procedures that define climate,

which, in turn, are the bases for cultural values, beliefs, and basic assumptions" (Schneider & Barbera 2014b:684). In the context of this study, organisational climate and culture will be used interchangeably, because both constructs are included in the discussions.

3.5.3.1 Influence of organisational policies and practices in the development of an organisational climate and/or culture

As was argued previously, one of the pivotal ways in which an organisational culture is developed is through the policies and practices of the organisation. When considering gay individuals' experiences of the disclosure of their sexual identity within their organisational contexts, policies and practices of an organisation may influence their disclosure experiences. A number of studies were conducted that found that, when there was organisational support for gay individuals through policies and practices, then gay individuals felt more likely to disclose their sexual identity. For example, Wessel (2017:242) found that "broader organizational support can also influence decisions, by making the individual feel more protected and less fearful of negative consequences following disclosure".

Ragins and Cornwell (2001:1255) observe that organisations merely having policies in place against discrimination against a person based on his/her sexual identity and other sensitive issues, does not ensure that the organisational culture aligns with it or that staff actually embrace these policies. However, it is possible for gay individuals to be protected from hetero-sexist environments by empathetic co-workers, and by supervisors who enforce anti-discriminatory policies. This lack of discrimination and acceptance of varied sexual identities has to be part of the organisational climate and/or culture to permeate the organisational climate and/or culture. The more an organisation supports gay individuals through policies allowing the same corporate benefits for gay employees' partners, the more supportive the organisational climate and/or culture is deemed to be by the gay individuals. Organisations that have a no-tolerance-for-discrimination policy and those that have policies in place for the protection of vulnerable individuals (in this case gay individuals) will have a more integrated climate and/or culture of acceptance. Moreover, organisations have to ensure that openly gay people are not ostracised or isolated. Cooperative tasks and activities can assist with ensuring that these individuals are not isolated in the organisation. Supportive organisations with non-discriminatory policies and managers, who enforce policies against sexual discrimination, encourage social inclusion and foster a willingness to disclose. If

organisations have non-discriminatory policies and the institutional climate and/or culture and practices do not allow discrimination, it will create a more gay-friendly environment. Therefore, it is suggested that organisations should develop and encourage an organisational culture free of discrimination and include the same rights in policies for a gay individual's partner/spouse as they would for a heterosexual spouse (Bernstein & Swartwout 2012:1162; Dentato, Craig, Messinger, Lloyd & McInroy 2014:492; Köllen 2016:1972; Ragins & Cornwell 2001:1255; Tejeda 2006:47; Wessel 2017:242–243).

Tejeda (2006:47) observes that the social and psychological comfort brought by these types of policies may lead to gay employees feeling positive towards their organisation and accepted in the organisational climate and/or culture. After examining various studies, Tejeda (2006:48) extrapolates that organisations that are considered by employees as sustaining robust non-discriminatory policies often create a gay-friendly environment, and are likely to see more disclosure of sexual identity. This type of organisational context will likely have loyal, productive employees, in turn, who are also more likely to experience job satisfaction, which tends to lead to improved productivity.

Rostosky and Riggle (2002:411) argue that the social acceptance of gay individuals and relationships with colleagues is personal, individual and unique with each colleague to whom the gay individual discloses. However, if an organisation has inclusive policies and is anti-discriminatory, it generally creates an organisational culture of acceptance of diversity, which may send a message to workers that discrimination against gay individuals will not be tolerated and that it is a psychologically "safe" organisation. Rostosky and Riggle (2002:412) continue by stating that the risk factor of disclosure of a person's sexual identity would be less intimidating in a social context that does not narrowly define sexual identity and in an organisation that attached less of a stigma to those who are not heterosexual and do not always assume everyone was heterosexual.

3.5.3.2 The organisational climate and/or culture influences disclosure

The organisational culture also affects the experience of the individual in disclosing personal information to his/her colleagues. Collins (2016:26) supports this argument by stating that an organisational climate and/or culture influences the way individuals experience work and the way in which gay individuals may experience and perceive the disclosure of their sexual identity. Collins (2016:26) explains how gay individuals have to negotiate with themselves to decide if their disclosure of being gay is worth the risk of disclosure. The possibility of stigmatisation and stereotyping is always present, even if it

comes from certain colleagues only. However, Collins (2016:26) adds that, if a gay individual opts not to disclose his/her sexual identity, then if and when this individual does disclose his/her sexual identity to his/her colleagues or they find out s/he is gay from others, then the gay individual could be perceived as being dishonest. Collins (2016:26) further observes that gay individuals have to deal with such choices because of issues around heteronormativity, where it is posited that heterosexuality is normal and anything outside of that is considered deviant in some way.

3.5.3.3 The role of relationships and communication in the development of organisational climate and/or culture

Relationships and communication play a key role in the development of organisational culture and it was argued that both culture and inter-organisational relationships are core to the purpose of this study. This is supported by authors such as Larentis *et al* (2017:51), who point out, "… interorganisational relationships as well as organisational cultures, are complex. To be developed, they rely on communication, learning, trust, commitment, shared meanings and symbols. Relationships are not chosen they are developed." Tension and poor communication in organisational relationships may lead to less productive environments and strained relationships, which may have an impact on the communication and relationship going forward (Mcintosh & Luecke 2008:6). Keyton (2014:122) explicates that an organisation is in itself a culture: in other words, organisations are isomorphic and are grounded in the communication practices of those who inhabit the organisation. The symbolic relations of day-to-day interactions in the organisation and culture is present in all communication behaviour. Communication is not only about what is done by individuals in an organisation, but also, about how what is done is interpreted and perceived by individuals in the organisation. When viewing culture from a communicative perspective, it is recognised that the societal norms, patterns, beliefs and values either aid or restrain an organisational culture, because it is recognised that an organisational culture is a microcosm of a larger culture. As indicated in the social penetration theory, there are various interpersonal relationships at play, where some would be more distant and in the outer layer of an individual's engagement, while others would be more intimate (Keyton 2014:122–123).

3.5.4 Characteristics of cooperative organisational climates and cultures: constructive and supportive cultures versus defensive cultures

Cooke and Lafferty (1987) developed the most widely used and researched tool to measure organisational culture and behaviour and performance in particular, termed the *organisational culture inventory (OCI).* The OCI looks at two specific dimensions of culture: firstly, concern for people and, secondly, concern for task. Based on these two dimensions, Cooke and Lafferty (1987) compiled 12 sets of behavioural norms that are associated with three general groupings of organisational culture: (i) constructive culture, (ii) passive/defensive culture, and (iii) aggressive/defensive culture (Cooke & Szumal 2004:148–151). "Constructive cultures, which are characterized by norms for achievement, self-actualizing, humanistic encouraging, and affiliative behaviors, encourage members to interact with people and approach tasks in ways that will help them to meet their higher-order satisfaction needs. Passive/Defensive cultures, characterized by approval, conventional, dependent, and avoidance norms, encourage or implicitly require members to interact with people in ways that will not threaten their own personal security. Aggressive/Defensive cultures encompassing oppositional, power, competitive, and perfectionistic norms, encourage or drive members to approach tasks in forceful ways to protect their status and security" (Cooke & Szumal 2004:148). In other words, constructive cultures can be considered as being supportive, cooperative and engaging organisational cultures with high levels of interaction among colleagues.

Defensive cultures can be either passive or aggressive. In the passive/defensive organisational cultures, it is more likely that individuals may avoid disclosure and, therefore, individuals working within these types of organisational cultures may be more risk averse and, thereby placing a stronger emphasis on the risk of disclosure. In the aggressive and defensive organisational cultures, individuals may have to deal with a great deal of power dynamics and individuals may find that it is too risky to disclose their sexual identity, if they want to protect their status within an organisation. This was indicated in the previously discussed case studies of disclosing sexual identity in highly "masculinised" organisational contexts.

Organisational cultures can be perceived as positive, negative or a combination of both. Moreover, organisational climate and/or culture have been ascribed to impelling the degree to which an organisation and specific units in the organisation are productive in

supportive and constructive cultures and counterproductive in defensive and negative cultures. Constructive cultures that are conducive to good work-life balance may lead to numerous engaging elements in an organisation, such as social inclusion, individuals thriving within the organisation and job satisfaction (Ashkanasy & Hartell 2014:136; Ehrhart & Raver 2014:153). Jex *et al* (2014:179) point out that "… people are attracted to, enjoy working in, and ultimately remain in organizations where they perceive that the culture of the organization is congruent with their personality". Referring to the previous discussion on organisational identity, this means that, if the individual's identity is in alignment with the organisational identity, climate and culture, there will be better synergy between them and the employee's mental wellbeing will improve. This is confirmed by Jex *et al* (2014:179), who state that it will present a better chance of an individual not only enjoying work, but also staying longer at the organisation.

Defensive cultures are generally negative and they perpetuate a fear-based culture that affects communication, making it a more closed organisational culture and less likely for disclosure to occur. Negative climates also foster insecurity, affect job attitudes and decrease satisfaction (Ashkanasy & Hartell 2014:141). Köllen (2016:1972) explains that non-supportive organisational climates are often associated with negativity and hostility, which affects job satisfaction. Non-supportive and/or defensive organisational cultures often have perceived barriers for disclosure. In juxtaposition, supportive and constructive cultures will offer employees support, leading to more open and inclusive cultures, which may encourage disclosure. Supportive organisational climates and/or cultures lead to less strain and improved mental wellbeing in the organisation (Dentato *et al* 2014:486; Jex *et al* 2014:179–180).

Supportive/constructive organisational cultures may lead to a better organisational experience, whereas disclosure is hampered in defensive organisational cultures. Tatum (2018:618–619) explains the dichotomy of choice that gay individuals have about disclosure. – On the one hand, disclosure may lead to more job satisfaction, better productivity and a better mental and physical wellbeing in the organisation, but on the other hand, disclosure of sexual identity may lead to organisational barriers, such as lack of advancement opportunities, organisation incivility and even interpersonal harassment. From a personal social context and connected to personal friendships outside of work, an individual can walk away if s/he discloses and the disclosure leads to negative outcomes. However, this is not the case with relationships in work environments, which

is why gay individuals need to consider the positive and potential negative factors involved in disclosure. Each time gay individuals choose to conceal or disclose their sexual identity to colleagues, they have to make decisions about the communication with which they will use to do so. The supportiveness that is conveyed to an individual within the organisation may encourage and/or discourage disclosure (Sabat, Trump & King 2014:436–439; Wessel 2017:40).

Köllen (2016:1972) continues this point of view and by explaining that, "…organizational climate works as a mediating variable between an individual's organisational behaviour, organizational performance, individual perceptions and human resource management practices, such as diversity management". Zang *et al* (2015:54) point out that organisations with a high level of cooperation are best at maintaining reliable environments characterised by mutual communication, open channels, employee socialisation and mutual understanding.

As indicated, there is a psychological aspect to organisational climate, which involves employees having their own unique perceptions about the organisational climate. Individuals draw conclusions about a given environment and there is a sense of shared meaning in the context of organisational climates and/or cultures. Individuals working in a specific environment will develop a common understanding, based on the organisational climate and/or culture, but they also have their own unique perceptions of the environment, which will generate a shared and individual meaning (Jex *et al* 2014:179–180). Therefore, Jex *et al* (2014:192) conclude that organisational climate and/or culture have an impact on an individual's stress levels and wellbeing, with stress, strain and wellbeing not only being based on an individual's own psychological make-up, but also on the contribution it makes to the organisational climate and/or culture. According to them, a positive and supportive organisational climate and/or culture will result in employees experiencing less stress, which, in turn, may lead to increased wellbeing. These authors also suggest that important future research would be to examine balancing work and non-work issues. This links to the purpose of this study concerning the interpersonal relationships and non-work related reality-altering events, which still influence work relationships.

3.5.4.1 Psychologically safe organisations

Edmondson (2018) explains that, in order for employees to perform optimally, they need to feel safe and secure in their organisational contexts. Healthy and psychologically safe

organisations in which employees feel accepted and respected are considered as having positive organisational climates and/or cultures. Research evidence indicates that this positive climate and/or cultures leads to higher productivity, increased employee loyalty, positive employee attitudes and better work output. In positive organisational climate and/or cultures that are psychologically safe, employees can exercise open communication and express themselves freely (Ashkanasy & Hartell 2014:138, 140). Ashkanasy and Hartell (2014:140) explain that positive work cultures result in an increase in job satisfaction, less illness, fewer people booking off from work, less defensiveness, less workplace stress and less protection required against workplace stress, increased commitment, more engagement with colleagues, lower levels of job burnout and lower staff turnover.

3.5.4.2 Trust in the organisation

Zang, You and Wang (2015:49) express that there is a concept referred to as "interpersonal trust". This illustrates a mutual recognition of the facets that build confidence about someone, such as integrity, goodwill, skill, and similar values, then there will be an increase in interpersonal trust and more confidence among individuals in the organisational context and increased sharing of information will be more prevalent. Naumovski *et al* (2016) further posits that trust and openness lead to improved and more effective communication.

3.5.4.3 Perceived risks of disclosure

Due to the psychosocial adjustment resulting from disclosure, Rostosky and Riggle (2002:411) argue that, each time gay individuals consider using communication to disclose their sexual identity to a colleague, they need to assess the possible risks and benefits involved in the disclosure. Each time they disclose their sexual identity, the situation would be different, because it depends on the context and to whom they are disclosing. In some cases, disclosure may lead to forms of discrimination, ostracisation and social isolation and, in extreme cases, it may lead to personal attacks and even job loss. Yet, in other instances, it may lead to deeper and more fulfilling interpersonal interactions and to a gay individual feeling more satisfied at work. If a gay individual opts not to disclose his/her sexual identity at all, research shows that the non-disclosure may lead to a lack of productivity.

Exhaustive research – such as that of Ragins and Cornwell (2001), Valentine (1993), Croteau (1996) and Day and Schoenrade (1997) – observes more discrimination,

victimisation and difficulty disclosing sexual identity in the organisational context, compared to studies conducted from the early 2000s onwards, which seem to indicate less discrimination and victimisation and more fear of social rejection. The earlier studies demonstrate gay individuals fearing job loss, being passed up for promotion and other high-risk factors. Recent research aligns the risk of disclosure with social rejection, rather than job loss, being passed up for promotions or severe victimisation. While studies conducted from the early 2000s onwards do purport that organisations seem to be more accepting of gay individuals, disclosure of sexual identity is still challenging for gay individuals, because they continue to be concerned about issues such as rejection and changed behaviour towards them, once colleagues discover that they are gay. Hence, there seems to have been a shift towards a greater consideration of social aspects within the organisation, as opposed to work-related discrimination, such as job risk and not being promoted. Tejeda (2006:46, 53, 58) confirms the position that discrimination against gay individuals does still exist in the organisation and found the following results:

- In environments that enforce non-discriminatory policies, gay men find that there is still hostility towards them from some heterosexual or anti-gay colleagues. This could be because of the stigma of being gay and that some of the heterosexual employees' values may not align with the organisational identity of having a non-discrimination policy, particularly if the organisational identity goes against the heterosexual employee's personal identity and values, which may lead to hostility towards the gay individual.
- Many gay individuals still feel that disclosure may not lead to a positive outcome; so they are cautious of disclosing their sexual identity as gay.
- Gay men working in organisations that implement non-discriminatory policies report far more job satisfaction, relationship quality with colleagues and in particular supervisors and high levels of organisational citizenship, as opposed to their counterparts in organisations that do not enforce the same level of non-discrimination policies.
- Promotions do not seem to be influenced by the disclosure of a person's sexual identity.

Moreover, Giritli Nygren *et al* (2017:418–421) conducted research on the risk in the everyday lives of LGBTQ individuals. One of their areas of exploration was the perceived experience of disclosure of gay individuals to colleagues in heteronormative

organisational contexts. The gay individuals found that, in heteronormative organisational contexts, they may be judged according to heteronormativity and heteronormative norms. They use evidence-based findings to explain, "… some of the interviewees had, after several years at the same organisation, still not told colleagues or their employer about their same-sex partner out of fear of discrimination or repudiation. Also, comments and jokes about gays in the organisation make some of the interviewees reluctant to tell their colleagues about their own sexuality, since they fear a negative response" (Giritli Nygren *et al* 2017:418–421).

In a survey that the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) conducted in 2015 on the attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa, it was found that discrimination towards gay individuals does exist within South Africa. The results particularly focused on negative moral beliefs stemming from the fact that South Africa is considered a religious society and based, on this, a "large segment, if not the majority, of the South African population hold conservative moral beliefs about individual sexual activity and gender roles, which corresponds with their religious affiliation" (Sutherland *et al* 2016:23, 45). This aligns with the study conducted by Bernstein and Swartwout (2012:1149), which found that it is complex for gay individuals to feel entirely comfortable disclosing their sexual identity to deeply religious colleagues for whom homosexuality goes against their religious beliefs. Therefore, a gay individual may be less likely to disclose his/her sexual identity to this colleague. Bernstein and Swartwout (2012:1149) also found that, in some cases, the concept of religion has influenced the reaction of an individual to the disclosure of sexual identity, in that highly religious people are considered more negative towards gay individuals at times.

In the aforementioned HSRC survey into attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa, Sutherland *et al* (2016:3) also note that there is deep-rooted discrimination in Africa towards same-sex relationships, with the majority of countries that criminalise consensual same-sex relationships to be on the African continent. However, they do explain (Sutherland *et al* 2016:3) that, although there is a general belief that in Africa people can be homophobic, there has been little extant research into this topic and, therefore, much of this belief is perception based. However, given the two afore-mentioned comments, it does remain a perceived risk for gay individuals to disclose and each time they do, they have to consider the possible discrimination and mistreatment that may emanate from exposing themselves as gay.

However, according to Sutherland *et al* (2016:41), it is prudent for gay individuals to note that a predicator of changing an individual's attitude towards gay individuals, as was found in many studies, is the amount of direct contact that someone has with gay individuals, particularly if those individuals are family members or have close ties to an individual. However, Mizzi (2013:1619) holds firm that some gay individuals may opt not to disclose their sexual identity, due to the possible negative influences of this disclosure on their organisational relationships with colleagues and possible fear of social isolation.

The literature identifies discrimination as one of the concerns of gay individuals in the disclosure of their sexual identity. Cavalier (2011:629–630) explored the individual experience of organisational discrimination and how each individual perceives the interpretation and discrimination of his/her disclosure of sexual identity and a colleague's subsequent reaction in different ways, based on his/her unique experience. He found that discrimination in the organisation is not always a formal type of discrimination; it may be informal and occurs in social settings in the organisation. At times, the discrimination is real, but at other times, it is the perception of the gay individual. However, even if the discrimination is perceived rather than real, it is still an individual's own experience and, in this way, it will be real to him/her.

The study also used a symbolic interaction framework, which aligns with the theoretical foundation of this study and, therefore, some of these points are in alignment with this particular study. Cavalier (2011:630–631) also explains that employees interpret their experiences in the organisational context and assess the messages that they receive overtly and subtly to gain an overall perception of their organisational culture. Individuals will present and perceive their sexual identity as gay, in order to gain an understanding of their identity in relation to their organisational identity, thereby determining who their allies are and how they will present themselves and construct meaning of the disclosure of being gay and function as a gay individual within a professional context. Employees will have an opinion on their organisational context – i.e. organisational climate, culture and identity and their colleagues – and form a perception of their environment and the way in which individuals may react to a reality-altering event. In this case, it is the perception of how conducive the organisational context is to gayness and how the rest of the employees behave towards gay people. These perceptions will influence the gay individual's actions.

Some literature on minority sexual orientation and disclosure underlines the positive outcomes of the process of “coming out” for the individual (in this case in the organisational context), in terms of empowerment, happiness and confidence, or in terms of greater satisfaction at work, psychological commitment and experiencing less organisational conflict (Benozzo, Pizzorno, Bell & Koro-Ljungberg 2015:292–293). However, in other cases, the stereotypes, which gay individuals often have to face in the organisational context, are underlined. As pointed out by Köllen (2016:1969–1973), gay men and women often face various stereotypes, discriminations and demotions in the organisation.

One of the ways people cope with the complexity of multi-faceted realities is by stereotyping. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2019) and concurred by the *Collins Dictionary,* (2019) a *stereotype* is a preconceived idea or characteristics that numerous individuals hold about a group, an individual or thing. Gay men and women have to make a decision daily as to how and/or if they will or will not disclose, because, for the most part, people in the organisation assume that most people are heterosexual and, therefore, gay individuals will have different degrees of openness that they will share with others. When considering the risk of disclosure based on stereotypes, it should be remembered that they are part of heteronormativity. In the heteronormative organisational contexts, individuals often stereotype people (put people in categories), in order to make sense of reality and to avoid feeling overwhelmed. In this research, it is recognised that employees have a series of experiences within the organisation but the employees collectively give meaning to these experiences and, through this, an individual will build perceptions about the organisational climate and/or culture.

As discussed in Chapter 2 and based on Blumer’s work, meaning is specific to each individual’s interpretation. In the findings of the study that Cavalier (2011:645–646) conducted in the sporting profession, it is purported, that at times, the negative experiences of gay individuals of disclosing their sexual identity are not based on actual experience, but rather on the perceived experience of what could happen, if they were to disclose their sexual identity. This perception is based on the collective experience of the gay individual in their professional contexts. Each gay individual’s perception of disclosure of his/her sexual identity is based on his/her socially constructed and co-constructed social reality with others and this perception will influence decision-making, relationships and future disclosures in his/her organisation.

3.6 Conclusion

The main argument in this chapter was that disclosure of personal information within the organisational context, such as sexual identity, carries risks. The risk levels are determined by multiple factors and are influenced by the organisational climate and/or culture in which the gay individual exists, how non-discriminatory the culture is and the colleagues with whom s/he works. The less a gay individual feels that it is risky to disclose his/her sexual identity, the more likely s/he is to disclose his/her sexual identity. Gay individuals who are able to be open within their organisations, without facing discrimination or social isolation, generally experience a better mental wellbeing, are more productive, satisfied at work, and loyal to the organisation. The experience of this disclosure and the way it has influenced the gay individuals' interaction behaviour with colleagues will ultimately be integrated into the development and fluidity of their professional identity. Having positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues is important for several reasons, but arguably, most importantly, because it can lead to job satisfaction, mental wellbeing, trust relationships, loyalty and increased productivity.

It was argued that identity is constantly in a state of flux and with each experience, an individual's identity is shared and developed. It was argued that each time gay individuals disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational context, it will contribute to the formation of their professional identity. Two identities most relevant to the study were identified, namely professional identity and sexual identity. It was posited that individuals' sexual identity are part of their personal identity and their professional identity almost stand separate from this, but there are times when the two connect or intersect and in the disclosure of an individual's sexual identity within his/her organisational context, there is divergence, even if only for a short period.

From the afore-mentioned explanations of identity, it is key to extrapolate that an individual's identity is always multiple and never singular. In order to contextualise and justify the decision to use sexual identity, the difference between sexual orientation and sexual identity was explored. It was justified why sexual identity was the chosen way of referring to gay individuals in this study. It was recognised that a critical influence on the interaction behaviour between gay individuals and colleagues is the fact that individuals function within a heteronormative context and that the way in which the gay individuals' colleagues frame their social reality related to gay individuals, is based on heteronormativity, which may influence their response to disclosure of sexual identity.

The chapter presented an explanation of disclosure and the influence of disclosure on relationship formation and continuation and, in this case, that information is highly personal. This was followed by a discussion on the social penetration theory as an application of disclosure. It was elucidated that disclosure occurs at different personal layers and generally takes place when an individual feels secure enough to disclose personal information to a particular person within a specific context. The context needs to be a place in which the individual feels safe to reveal personal information and, therefore, organisational contexts, which are psychologically safer, constructive, supportive and more inclusive, often encourage disclosure.

Subsequently, it was posited that, although organisations have different types of communication, the forms of organisational communication relevant to this study include informal communication and interpersonal communication strategies versus more open and spontaneous communication. It was suggested that, when individuals are more cautious and purposeful about their communication, they would use interpersonal communication strategies and when they feel more open and less contrived in their communication, it is generally more spontaneous and open communication. Moreover, when gay individuals open up to colleagues and are then not discriminated against, it is perceived that the communication would alter from strategic communication to more open and spontaneous forms of communication.

It was also postulated that one of the influencers of open and spontaneous communication is an open and positive organisational climate and/or culture. It was argued that organisational culture is tacit social knowledge of an organisation, such as values and beliefs. Organisational cultures can be positive, negative or a combination of both. The type of organisational climates and/or cultures that would encourage and/or discourage disclosure were explored by utilising Cooke and Lafferty's three groupings of culture – i.e. constructive cultures, passive/defensive cultures and aggressive/defensive cultures. Moreover, there was an emphasis on how positive cultures and organisations that promote psychologically safe workspaces are more conducive for disclosure and contribute towards happier and healthier employees.

It was noted that some of the more recent research on disclosure of sexual identity seems to align the risk of disclosure with social rejection, rather than job loss, being passed up for promotions or severe victimisation as an example. Whilst the evidence

does seem to purport that organisations do seem more accepting of gay individuals in recent times, disclosure of sexual identity is still a contentious act for the gay individual, because s/he will still be concerned about issues such as rejection and changes in interaction behaviour.

It was further argued that the individual experience of organisational acceptance or discrimination and each individual's perception of his/her disclosure experience, is important, even if that experience is not real, but rather the perception of reality, because that still means it is his/her experience of reality. It was argued that discrimination in the organisational context is not always a formal discrimination; it may also be informal and occur in social settings in the organisation. It was also argued that, when individuals are more cautious about disclosure and or trying not to disclose personal information, the communication is strategic. However, once communication is more open, it alters from strategic to spontaneous communication. It was postulated that a more inclusive environment for sharing may garner employee loyalty, better team cooperation, a more cooperative organisational reality, and trust amongst employees, increased employee wellbeing and more effective communication processes.

It was concluded that gay individuals continue to assess the possible risks and benefits of disclosure with each individual with whom they co-construct social reality in their organisational context. It was purported that, in some cases, disclosure may lead to forms of discrimination, ostracisation and social isolation, and in more extreme cases, it could lead to personal attacks and even job loss. Yet, in other instances, it may lead to deeper and more fulfilling interpersonal interactions and to a gay individual feeling more satisfied at work.

The next chapter will focus on the research design and methodology. The chapter will outline the methodological aspects underpinning this study and will provide an elucidation of the strategy of inquiry and research methods used. The meta-theoretical, ontological and epistemological concerns of the interpretivist paradigm guided the strategy of inquiry and research methods. The main aim will be to highlight the research approach, design and the methodology that was used to collect and analyse the data for this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. ~ Zora Neale Hurston

4.1 Introduction

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, to gain an in-depth understanding of the possible influence that a reality-altering event may have on interaction behaviour (communication) and develop a conceptual framework for re-communication, a qualitative, exploratory research design was selected to extrapolate the data by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews and narratives. It was out of the collected and analysed data that the communication strategies emerged, which participants use when they avoid disclosing their sexual identity, concealing their sexual identity and disclosing their sexual identity. The development of the resultant re-communication conceptual framework was based on the analysis of the collected data. The re-communication conceptual framework developed out of these extrapolations was synergised by means of a thematic textual analysis and guided by a number of assumptions and postulations arising from a strong theoretical foundation and a solid literature review, which supported the findings.

This chapter moves onto the methodological aspects that underpin this study and elucidates the strategy of inquiry and research methods that were used. The meta-theoretical, ontological and epistemological positions of the interpretivist paradigm, which guided the strategy of inquiry and research methods of this study, are also discussed.

Therefore, the main aim in this chapter is to describe the research approach, design and the methodology involved in this study. As a point of departure, the chapter opens by explaining and justifying the qualitative research design that was utilised, followed by a brief account of the strategy of inquiry that was employed, namely phenomenology. This is followed by an explanation of the sampling design, by classifying the sample and the sample type and size. The data collection methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews and narratives are explained, as are the data analysis methods of narrative analysis and thematic textual analysis. This is followed by an explanation of the data analysis

techniques. In the data analysis discussion, the actual procedures that were used are explained.

The chapter concludes with an exposition of the feasibility of the study, where it is argued that, within phenomenological qualitative studies, the use of reliability and validity as the means to ensure feasibility does not provide the type of trustworthiness required in qualitative studies. It should be noted that many qualitative researchers still use the terms “reliability” and “validity”, but they apply them differently. Due to the interpretivist paradigm that this study is rooted in, this study used the terms more frequently used within qualitative and phenomenological studies. Therefore, the concept of trustworthiness as the holistic means of evaluating reliability and validity within qualitative research has been adopted for the purpose of this study (Lincoln & Guba 1985:289–323; Shenton 2004).

4.2 Research approach and design

Because of the penchant of interpretivists to utilise qualitative research and the previously explored (in Chapter 1) ontological and epistemological positions of the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative design was selected for this study. There are several approaches to research. – The positivistic approach, which is usually linked to the natural sciences and quantitative research methods, sees the social world as having a concrete and unmoving reality, which goes against the purpose of this study. For the purpose of this study, social reality is posited as a uniquely individual experience that is in a constant state of evolution, influenced by various social factors, and is in continual flux, which is the antithesis of a positivistic approach. On the other hand, an anti-positivist and interpretive approach or social sciences is usually linked to qualitative methods and sees social reality as subjective, socially constructed and altered by individuals based on their experiences. This aligns with the purpose of this study of the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour and co-constructed social realities.

The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that quantitative research is primarily focused on measuring, counting and controlling variables, which would not add value to this study, which requires an in-depth analysis, in order to solicit thick descriptions. In juxtaposition, qualitative researchers attempt to explain phenomena through an in-depth understanding and thick detailed descriptions of participants’ thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions. This directly aligns with the purpose of this study,

which aims at understanding the perceptions, thoughts, feelings and ideas of the participants' experiences of disclosing their sexual identity (Gicuru 2017:3; Rahman 2017:102–103; Thanh & Thanh 2015:26; Welman *et al* 2007:6–7).

Bryman and Bell (2014:31) and Welman *et al* (2007:8–9) argue that the primary reasoning in quantitative research is a deductive approach to reasoning, with testing being at the core of what quantitative researchers do. Deductive reasoning is used in an attempt to identify and isolate variables, reach the objectives of a quantitative design, which, as was already established, includes quantities, predictions and the collection of numerical data using statistical techniques. The observations, which are obtained during quantitative analysis, are calculated quantifiably and statistically and, although modifications can be made, in general, quantitative research is reliant on statistical data.

Bryman and Bell (2014:41) explain that, unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers prefer "… induction, informed by constructionism and interpretivism". The emphasis is on individuals, how an individual would perceive and interpret the reality (this would include co-constructed social realities) and the social realm in which s/he exists. Interpretivist argue that reality is in a constant state of flux and is based on an individual's own interpretation.

Kumar (2014:14) adds that qualitative research is more flexible in nature and places emphasis on the descriptions of narratives, opinions, beliefs, perceptions and experiences and not on quantifiable measuring. Qualitative research is focused on human experiences, behaviour, emotion, organisational functioning, social movements, experiences, *etc.* Qualitative research is exploratory and has a flexible design, in that it can be constructed and reconstructed, as is the case with semi-structured interviews that were used in this study. Unlike quantitative research, which is precise and objective, qualitative research is subjective in nature, because it takes human experiences and the meaning that individuals ascribe to these experiences into account. Critical to qualitative research is gaining rich text, insights and in-depth information (Almeida, Faria & Queirós 2017:370; Gicuru 2017:3; Rahman 2017:102–103; Thanh & Thanh 2015:26; Welman *et al* 2007:6–7). The purpose of this study does not lend itself to a quantifiable measurement and statistical outputs, because each participant will experience the disclosure of their sexual identity in a different way and each disclosure to a different

colleague will be a different experience. In order to gain an in-depth understanding, rich data is required.

Although quantitative research does have its merits, it does not acknowledge the uniqueness of individual experiences as is required for this study. On the other hand, qualitative methodology offers advantages that bode well to the research problem and questions, such as the flexible nature and pragmatism of qualitative research, which can be adjusted, based on the context of the study or exposure to unexpected interaction. Qualitative research ensures a more in-depth knowledge base and perspective. Qualitative research is focused on the unquantifiable aspects of reality with a specific focus on exploring the dynamics of social relations (Almeida *et al* 2017:370; Locke, Silverman & Spirduso 2004:211; Locke *et al* 2010:227; Rossman & Rallis 2003:2–13; Weinberg 2002:165; Wimmer & Dominick 2004:47). All these characteristics of qualitative research align with the purpose and goals of this study; particularly the unique perceptions, meaning and co-constructed social realities and interaction behaviour that each gay individual experiences each time s/he discloses to a colleague.

4.3 Application of a qualitative design

Davis (2014:12) and Kumar (2014:13) explain that research is classified as descriptive, correlational, explanatory or exploratory. When a study is conducted on an area that has not been researched in-depth before or if a limited amount of research has been conducted on the topic, then the use of exploratory research is most advantageous (Davis 2014:12; Kumar 2014:13). A qualitative methodology was utilised because of the varied qualities and characteristics of qualitative research, which include, but are not limited to, its interpretative nature, gaining insight and meaning, and its exploratory and flexible approach (Almeida *et al* 2017:370; Gicuru 2017:3; Rahman 2017:102–103; Thanh & Thanh 2015:26; Welman *et al* 2007:6–7). Data was interpreted in relation to gay individuals' interaction behaviour when they are still trying to avoid disclosure of their sexual identity or conceal it; the actual disclosure of their sexual identity (the reality-altering event); and the influence disclosure may have on their interaction behaviour and co-constructed social reality with colleagues within an organisational context.

Furthermore, within the context of this particular study, a qualitative design was employed to collect rich, descriptive data from the participants. This was done by using two-fold methodological triangulation: in-depth semi-structured interviews and narratives

were used. The questions in the semi-structured in-depth interviews were constructed around themes that were deductively derived from the theoretical foundation and literature review. Questions were open-ended and there was a great deal of engagement between the researcher and participants, thereby allowing for a flexible and open engagement on the topic. Furthermore, through exploration and the continual clarification between the researcher and participants, new questions and themes arose inductively. In order to keep the approach dynamic, after each interview the data was transcribed to update questions to include the new data where needed, before the next interview. The semi-structured in-depth interview informed consent is attached as Addendum B and the standard semi-structured interview questions can be found in Addendum C.

The second method in the qualitative design was narrative inquiry, where participants (the interviewees and additional participants) were asked to describe one instance in which they told a colleague in their current organisation that they are gay and they perceived the encounter as having had a negative effect on their communication with this colleague. They were asked to explain how they told this colleague that they are gay and to give examples of how, or if their communication with this colleague had been altered after they had told them they were gay. Finally, they were asked if this negative experience in anyway influenced their decision to tell other colleagues and, if so, how. They were then asked to describe the same elements, but this time by using one instance in which they disclosed their sexual identity as being gay to a colleague within their organisational contexts and the disclosure led to a perceived positive alteration in their communication with colleagues. An example of the narrative inquiry consent form is attached as Addendum D and the instruction for the narrative inquiry is attached as Addendum E.

The extrapolation of data collected and analysed allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' understanding of re-communication, in order to provide a thick description of this phenomenon. Therefore, in-depth understanding was gained of participants' experiences and perceptions of disclosing their sexual identity to their colleagues. The researcher obtained an in-depth understanding of the possible elements that could encourage or discourage disclosure; the strategies gay individuals use to avoid disclosure of their sexual identity and/or conceal their sexual identity, termed self-preservation communication strategies, the actual disclosure strategies (indirectly or

directly); and the unintentional, spontaneous and unsolicited way in which disclosure sometimes occurs. This is coupled with the perceived alteration in communication between gay individuals and their colleagues that disclosure or non-disclosure brings. Although it might not have been explicitly verbalised by the participants, the results also showed that where there was an alteration in communication post-disclosure, regardless of how small. There was also an alteration in the co-constructed social reality between the gay individuals and the colleagues to whom they had disclosed, based on the new information of the true sexual identity of the gay individual.

Before a discussion of the specific methodologies that were used in this study can ensue, the strategy of inquiry that the researcher followed must first be clarified. A combination of primary data and literature was used to identify and describe the self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and re-communication that make up the re-communication conceptual framework. Deductive reasoning, based on the theoretical foundation and literature review, was utilised to form the foundation of the study, whereas inductive reasoning was used to elicit further themes and develop the re-communication conceptual framework. The strategy of inquiry that was used to inform the methodology is discussed in the next section.

4.4 Strategy of inquiry: Phenomenology

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:283) identifies three types of strategies of inquiry that are used when conducting qualitative interpretivist research: ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology. In short, ethnography examines social units by looking at the values, attitudes and beliefs of these units and the way in which the group behaves within a social setting. When using ethnography as a strategy of inquiry, reality is seen as a subjective construct that is negotiated and created by people. Grounded theory relates to highly specific research methodologies in which a theory is developed through inductive reasoning.

In this case, a conceptual theoretical framework – the re-communication conceptual framework – was developed, as well as the identification, explaining and labelling of a previously unexplored phenomenon, namely re-communication. The re-communication framework is not a theory *per se,* but rather a conceptual framework. Furthermore, grounded theory uses inductive reasoning and this study used both inductive and deductive reasoning, with a stronger focus on deductive reasoning. Another reason for

using phenomenology, rather than ethnography or grounded theory, as a strategy of inquiry is that the main premises of phenomenology directly align to the purpose of this study.

Bryman and Bell (2014:15), Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:283) and Fouché and Schurink (2011:317), firstly, explain that phenomenology looks at the way in which individuals perceive, give meaning to, make sense of the world around them, and co-construct their reality in this regard. Secondly, meaning is critical to phenomenologists. They argue that not only are human actions and encounters considered to be meaningful to individuals, but also that based, on an individual's reality, s/he would ascribe meaning to his/her own acts and the acts of others in a given situation. Research of this nature should ensure that individuals' actions and perceptions of the social world are evaluated from his/her own perspective. This means that the role of the researcher would be to gain an in-depth understanding of a given human action and to explain this from an individual's own unique perspective and his/her perception of the action. In this way, phenomenology is about understanding the world from direct experience; it is about what an individual experiences and how s/he expresses this experience. Phenomenologists extrapolate the meaning of how humans experience a phenomenon. According to phenomenologists, researchers' observations are not reality, but rather an interpreted reality and a specific understanding of social and psychological phenomena from the viewpoint of the participant, which this is one of the reasons re-communication is deemed a phenomenon (Bryman & Bell 2014:15; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:283; Fouché & Schurink 2011:317).

Moreover, Fouché and Schurink (2011:317) agree that, at the root of phenomenology, is a need to obtain a rich understanding of individuals' own experiences, and the meaning that they ascribe to a given phenomenon. Phenomenology provides a description of given human experiences from their perspective. In a phenomenological study, questions that are directed at participants should be "directed at the meaning of participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question" (Fouché & Schurink 2011:317). This aligns directly to the trajectory of questions that were asked in this study. Although the themes were taken from the theoretical foundation and literature, there was leeway for participants to direct the discussion and to provide their own insight, with the main purpose of gleaning their perceptions of how the experience of disclosure of their sexual identity altered their interaction behaviour with a colleague, based on their experiences, feelings and beliefs (perception).

Based on the previous argumentation, it can be summarised that phenomenology is about a participant's experiences, beliefs, feelings and meaning ascribed to a given experience. Human actions and encounters are considered meaningful to individuals and, based on an individual's reality and co-constructed social realities, s/he would impute meaning to a given situation. The role of researchers in this process is to engage with each participant in a unique way and to gain an understanding of his/her unique perception of a given experience, thereby providing thick descriptions and an in-depth understanding of an individual's actions from his/her perspective. In this study, all these elements of phenomenology were relevant, because the study involved gay individuals' perceptions of the reality-altering event of disclosing their sexual identity; the use of communication strategies to avoid disclosure and/or conceal their sexual identity; the forms of communication used to disclose their sexual identity; and the sometimes unintentional, unsolicited and accidental way that disclosure occurs. This is coupled with the perceived alteration in communication between gay individuals and their colleagues after disclosure, namely re-communication. Furthermore, information was obtained to construct thick descriptions of how the participants perceive their communication to have altered with colleagues post-disclosure. Each time the communication disclosure occurs, the experience was unique. It was also noted that the construction of social reality (a theoretical base of this study) is based on the meaning ascribed to a given situation and meaning is communicated and understood via language.

Furthermore, as argued by Littlejohn and Foss (2008:34, 37, 43–44), it should be noted that communication theory is divided into seven traditions of which phenomenology is one and, in this way, this strategy of inquiry aligns with both qualitative interpretivist studies and with communication traditions. However, from a communication tradition perspective, this study did draw on elements from both phenomenology and the socio-cultural tradition, although it was not the strategy of inquiry. This is because of the focus of socio-cultural traditions on the patterns of interaction between people in social groups. It was not the strategy of inquiry of choice, because the unit of analysis of this study was individuals and their perception of interpersonal encounters and relationships (individual interaction behaviour in dyads), whereas the socio-cultural tradition looks at groups, not individuals.

4.5 Sampling

4.5.1 Unit of analysis

It is often neither possible nor plausible to observe each instance of a phenomenon being researched. Therefore, a portion is taken from the unit of analysis making up the phenomenon and this portion is termed the *sample* (Welman *et al* 2007:43). Pascoe (2014:134) points out that both the purpose of a study and the research design and approach would assist in determining the size of the sample that is needed. The unit of analysis for this study is gay professional individuals and the parameters that were used as criteria for the selection of participants for the purposive sample as follows:

- All participants had to be working professionals.
- All participants had to have been employed in their current organisations for at least one year. Someone who has just started out in a job is less likely to have disclosed personal and/or sensitive information in his/her organisation, therefore, did not qualify to be included in the sample. It is assumed that after working in an organisation for at least a year, the gay individual would have had several opportunities to engage with multiple colleagues and would have built interpersonal relationships with some of them.
- All participants had to identify themselves as gay and could not still be questioning or exploring their sexual identity or be bisexual, transgender, *etc.*
- All participants had to be able to converse in English, because all the interviews were conducted in English and all the narratives had to be written in English for data collection and analysis purposes. Therefore, participants had to be able to express themselves proficiently in English.
- In order to control the levels of maturity and the establishment of a sexual identity, all participants had to be twenty-five years and older.
- In order to facilitate easy and frequent access to them, all participants in the face-face interactions had to live in or around the Gauteng Province in South Africa.

The sample taken from the population was based on the non-probability, purposive sampling technique, which is justified in the next section.

4.5.2 Non-probability sample

There are two different types of samples, namely probability and non-probability samples. In probability sampling, which is most often used in quantitative research, where the aim is to generalise results to a bigger population, each part of the population has an equal and independent opportunity of being selected for the sample. A representative sample is more likely when a probability sample is used and the sampling error is kept lower. Non-probability samples, on the other hand, do not require a list of all the elements within the population and the probability that any unit of analysis will be included in a non-probability sample cannot be specifically determined (Babbie & Mouton 2001:166; Berg 2001:21; Bryman & Bell 2014:170–171; Neuman 2000:196; Welman *et al* 2007:68). As explained by Pascoe (2014:137), non-probability sampling is most often used in qualitative research.

Non-probability samples are usually selected if it is difficult to ascertain who the entire population is, if it is difficult to gain access to a population, if the population is too vast, or if different elements cannot be individually identified (Kumar 2014:242; Pascoe 2014:137). In non-probability sampling, not every unit in the population has an equal chance of being selected as part of the population and/or not all individuals are easy to access. Therefore, the sample and population may not have the same parameters (Du Plooy 2009:113; Pascoe 2014:137–138). In this case, it is not probable or possible to gain access to every known gay professional, which is the reason for using a subset of the population. Because non-probability samples are not used to generalise results, the selection of participants in these samples are based on the researcher's judgement and in a purposeful manner, as opposed to being randomly selected. In this study, participants were selected from the researcher's own network, who fitted the selection criteria. It is recognised that human judgement will influence the selection process in non-probability sampling and that there is a risk of researcher bias (Bryman & Bell 2014:171; Du Plooy 2009:113; Kumar 2014:242; Pascoe 2014:137–138). The mitigation of this risk is discussed next.

Non-probability sampling was selected over probability sampling for a number of reasons, most specifically to ensure depth of understanding of individuals' unique experiences and not to generalise results. The goal was not to be prescriptive, but rather to provide insights into the possible communication strategies whilst deciding if or how disclosure would take place, the reality-altering event and any influence that disclosure

may have on interaction behaviour (i.e. re-communication) after the disclosure of the participants' sexual identity as gay. These strategies make up the components of the proposed re-communication conceptual framework. Because the individual experience was critical for the depth of thick data and due to the personal nature of the topic and experiences of the gay individuals, it would not have been possible to include an exhaustive list of every gay professional in the sample. Therefore, probability sampling could not be considered.

4.5.2.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, which is generally used in qualitative studies, where a researcher strategically uses his/her own judgement, so that those sampled are qualified to answer the research questions and address the areas that are important to the study (Bryman & Bell 2014:186; Pascoe 2014:142–143). A purposive sample can be used twofold: firstly, by means of the judgment of an expert in a case, or otherwise cases can be selected with a specific purpose in mind. Consequently, Welman and Kruger (2002:63) define a *purposive sample* as a sample in which "researchers are reliant on their experience, ingenuity and or previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample they obtain may be regarded as being representative of the relevant population". This type of sample is often used when researchers wish to study a particular unit of analysis, such as a group of people or organisation. This leads to the researcher focusing on specific target populations, while leaving out other possible groups. Subjects are selected non-randomly, based on the characteristics of the research and the researcher selects a specific sample, based on the purpose of a study, as was the case in this study (Frey, Botan, Friedman & Kreps 1991:135; Neuman 2000:198; Smith 1988:85; Welman & Kruger 2002:63; Welman *et al* 2007:69).

Bertram and Christiansen (2014:60–61) explain that purposive samples are usually found in studies where interpretivist or critical paradigms are used. In these instances, the researcher targets a specific population out of which a choice is made about who would best represent the purpose of that particular study and from that, a sample is selected. Kumar (2014:244) adds that the researcher's judgment is used, because the researcher would know who would be best suited to provide the information and depth needed to achieve the research goals and realise the purpose of the study. In other words, purposive sampling focuses on those who have the information and are willing to share that information.

This study was conducted on a relatively unknown topic, with the purpose of labelling a communication phenomenon that has not yet been classified. This was done by identifying and describing the communication phenomenon termed *re-communication*. As a result, few seminal texts and data were available on this topic as illustrated in Chapter 1 by the searches conducted on the topic. The population itself was too vast to include all possible participants and, therefore, parameters had to be built into the sample. Furthermore, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of this communication construct being named, intensive interviews needed to be conducted. Therefore, the researcher made use of a purposive sample.

As with all sample techniques, there are advantages and disadvantages of using purposive sampling. As a disadvantage, Frey *et al* (1991:135) suggest that, because subjects are selected non-randomly based on the characteristics of the research, the selection may be biased. Strydom (2011:232) concurs by explaining that the prominence of the researchers' judgment in this type of sample can be viewed as too prominent, thereby creating bias. Furthermore, Welman and Kruger (2002:63) state that, because researchers have different interpretations and proceed in different ways, it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which purposive samples are representative of the population. It is acknowledged that the aforementioned points could influence the study and that the researcher's judgement could have caused bias, but the researcher posits that the focus of the study is individuals' own unique and personal perceptions. Therefore, their own bias is evident and the researcher's own bias would not necessarily influence the findings. Moreover, the purpose of this re-communication conceptual framework is not to test and re-test the findings to increase the reliability of the results, which implies that it does not have to be representative of the population; instead, it should provide in-depth understanding, possible guidance and thick descriptions of an unnamed phenomenon and conceptual framework.

On the advantage side, Mason (2002:138) adds that purposive sampling is viewed as dynamic and interactive in its approach for data generation and analysis. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:279–280) states that, in qualitative research of a sensitive nature, which is the case in this study, the relationship between the researcher and participant is very important and a well-established trust, which may take years to build, needs to exist. Due to the sensitive nature of this particular study, the researcher included referrals,

colleagues, close friends and well-known acquaintances in the sample. The respect and trust that existed between the researcher and participants meant that participants were more willing and comfortable to provide sensitive information.

The age of participants varied, with the youngest participant being 26 and the oldest 55. Twenty-six participants were contacted to take part in the narratives, of whom 11 agreed to take part. Nine of those were women and two were men. Concerning the in-depth interviews, 14 people were contacted and ten people agreed to participate: five men and five women. Hence, in the end, insights were gained from 21 individuals of which seven were men and 14 women. However, the focus of this study and the underlying literature were not based on age, race or gender and, because too few individuals were included in this study, a meaningful analysis of demographic variables could not be included.

4.5.3 Sample size

The purpose of a qualitative study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived reality of each participant, which means that each participant forms part of an extensive process of data extraction (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:288; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006). However, since the aim of qualitative studies is in-depth understanding, as opposed to generalisability, the emphasis is on the quality of the data and not on the quantity of data. Kumar (2014:247) postulates that, because of the depth, diversity and exploratory nature of qualitative research, sample size and strategy do not play a substantial role in sample selection. Instead, emphasis is placed on the careful and purposeful selection of participants who would give a qualitative researcher the depth that s/he is trying to obtain. Kumar (2014:247) adds that, depending on the basis of information needed, it may even be possible to obtain the data from one person.

Since the emphasis of this study was on the collection of rich or “thick” data to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceived influence of a reality-altering event on the interaction behaviour and co-constructed social realities between colleagues within an organisational context, the sample size was determined by using the premise of theoretical saturation. In order to obtain a meaningful sample size that was able to provide the researcher with thick data, the researcher continued to select cases, until saturation point was reached.

It is posited that there comes a point in qualitative research at which the researcher reaches a saturation point, where new and relevant information is no longer obtained

from participants. This occurs when the information no longer adds to the new and interpretive account of the study and no new themes emerge from the data. This is known as *theoretical saturation*. However, there seems to be disagreement among authors regarding when theoretical saturation is reached in an in-depth qualitative study, where six participants are the sample size proposed at the lowest theoretical saturation point mentioned and 12 participants as the highest theoretical saturation point. The researcher conducted ten in-depth semi-structured interviews and collected 11 narratives (Bowen 2008; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:288–289; Guest *et al* 2006). However, Kumar (2014:248), who does not believe that a specific number can be rationalised, explains that data saturation is highly subjective and dependent on the diversity of the phenomenon or situation being researched and only the researcher with his/her depth of understanding of the topic will know when data saturation has been reached.

Moreover, interpretivist studies rely on small sample sizes that are selected on a purposeful basis, because in these types of studies more emphasis is placed on the skill of the researcher to analyse the data and the insights provided based on this analysis, than the size of the sample. Once the sample does not provide new, insightful, more in-depth information, or the new information is marginal, then data saturation would be considered reached and the sample size decided. This is significant when conducting interpretivist studies, because in-depth information extrapolation is important in interpretivist studies (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:288; Guest *et al* 2006; Kumar 2014:248).

In this study, the initial plan was to use the guidelines given by Bowen (2008), Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:288–289) and Guest *et al* (2006) and conduct six in-depth interviews as the guideline for theoretical saturation. However, in the end, the researcher conducted ten in-depth interviews. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with gay men and five with gay women, which was above the given point of theoretical saturation. However, in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study, the sample size was increased through 11 additional participants, who were contacted via electronic mail, telephonically or personally, to provide narratives. They were asked to describe two instances in which they told a colleague in their current organisational context that they are gay: one instance that they perceived as having had a negative effect on their interaction behaviour with this colleague and one in which the disclosure had a positive effect on interaction behaviour. They were asked to explain how they told this colleague that they are gay and to give examples of how or if their communication with this colleague had

altered after they had told them they were gay. Finally, they were asked if this negative experience in anyway influenced their decision to tell other colleagues and, if so, how. Then they were asked to describe the same elements, but this time using an instance in which their disclosure of their sexual identity led to a perceived positive alteration in their communication with colleagues. Therefore, triangulation of data methods was utilised to provide richer data and increase the trustworthiness of the study.

4.6 Data collection methods

Methodological triangulation increases the internal validity of research, which is referred to as t*rustworthiness* in qualitative studies (Mouton 2009:156; Wood 2006:30) and was utilised in this study. Therefore, two data collection methods were used to increase the trustworthiness of this study. Data was collected through a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews and narrative inquiry. Open-ended questions were predominantly used to collect data, because, as Du Plooy (2009:158) states, these types of questions elicit participants' thoughts, feelings, attitudes and opinions, thereby providing insight into participants' perceptions, which directly aligns with the purpose of this study. Open-ended questions were also best suited for the personal nature of the information that needed to be collected.

The theoretical foundation and literature review were used to develop the semi-structured questions for the in-depth interviews. The standard semi-structured interview questions are attached as Addendum C. Where applicable and as they emerged from the insight gained from subsequent interviews, additional questions were added to the list. Out of the participants' responses, the key ideas were grouped into dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes. Definitions of these themes were developed to promote shared meaning as part of the thematic textual analysis. These themes informed the identification and in-depth understanding of the forms of communication and processes used by gay individuals in the disclosure of their sexual identity within their organisational context, which make up the re-communication conceptual framework. The themes and definitions can be found in Addendum A. The themes that emerged from the literature and in-depth interviews are discussed in-depth in Chapters 5 and 6.

The two data collection methods that were used are explained in the next section.

4.6.1 Semi-structured in-depth interview

The first data collection method that was used was semi-structured in-depth interviews. Based on the theoretical discussion and constructs identified in Chapter 2 and 3, questions were set by utilising deductive reasoning and inductively based on responses. Kumar (2014:176) states that an interview is a pre-determined interpersonal interaction between two people, with one of the people (the researcher) generally framing a set of questions based on a theme with a specific purpose in mind to extract the information s/he requires. There are various types of interviews, but at its core an interview is an interaction with the purpose of obtaining information from participants (Bertram & Christiansen 2014:80; Kumar 2014:176).

Structured interviews have a set of pre-determined questions and all participants would be asked the same questions, using the same interview schedule with little flexibility in the process. Structured interview questions are generally pre-tested to ensure shared meaning and the standardisation of questions. Structured interviews follow a rigid approach to questioning, where the set questions are generally not deviated from regardless of the sequence of the interview. In contrast, unstructured interviews are informal in nature, allowing for freedom in structure, content and format style. The researcher may simply introduce a theme or topic and allow the participant to speak unguided and freely to it (Bertram & Christiansen 2014:81; Kumar 2014:177–178). The median between these two approaches is semi-structured in-depth interviews. Semi-structured in-depth interviews contain some standardised themes, items and or questions, but the interviewer has the flexibility to deviate from this structure. Questions asked may differ from participant to participant, depending on the direction in which the interview evolves (Du Plooy 2009:198; Welman *et al* 2007:166–167).

Kumar (2014:193) asserts that the root of in-depth interviewing comes from the interpretive paradigm. In-depth interviewing, therefore, has the individual and his/her perspectives, perceptions and unique experiences at the very core. In-depth interviews also involve repeated and in-depth interactions between the researcher and the participant. Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014:12–16) affirm that in-depth interviews are a qualitative data collection method that is used to create an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by obtaining participants' views, opinions and beliefs related to the phenomenon. In this study, the interviews were used as a means of exploring the perceived influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour within an

organisational environment, in order to develop a communication conceptual framework for an unexplored communication phenomenon, which is termed, *re-communication*. Another aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of and, thereby, provide a thick description of the previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon of re-communication. Lastly, the study aimed at exploring the communication that gay individuals use when they are still trying to avoid disclosure of their sexual identity and/or concealing it, the communication used in the disclosure of their sexual identity and the influence on interaction behaviour post-disclosure to colleagues within an organisational environment.

In order to extrapolate the information, predominately open-ended questions were used, which provided participants with an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions freely and openly and from their own perspective. Interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views and thoughts on a topic. A major advantage of these types of interviews is that they give the researcher the opportunity to ask for clarity and to probe deeper, while allowing flexibility for participants to explore their own thoughts. In this study, the researcher was able to achieve all of this, because she conducted face-to-face interviews and spent an extensive amount of time with the participants. Kumar (2014:193) adds that the researcher selects participants whom s/he believes will make it possible to gain the most insightful and in-depth information on the particular phenomenon, which also ties in with the non-probability purposive sample sampling technique of this study.

When conducting interviews, the researcher needs to consider a number of critical areas. Firstly, this was a perception-based study that was based on the perspective of the participants and what they think and feel – not on preconceived ideas of what the researcher thought the participants meant. Although the researcher did have preconceived ideas, based on her own experiences, she paid special attention not to interfere with the participants' responses and to respect the sensitivity of the topic. For many individuals, disclosing that they are gay in their organisational contexts is a highly personal and, therefore, sensitive matter. Some individuals even feel that such a disclosure could jeopardise their career and relationships with colleagues, depending on the organisational climate and/or culture. Listening to the participants played a central role in conducting the research. Moreover, the researcher is a Communication Science scholar and, therefore, she is trained as an empathetic listener. The researcher ensured

she was astute, asking for clarity if she was unsure about the meaning of a participant's response or perspective and, in some cases, she even went back to participants for clarity post the interview. The researcher also used her experience and insight in the topic to ensure that sub-texts and underlying meanings were not overlooked.

In order to ensure shared meaning between the researcher and the participant, the researcher gained insight into and an empathetic understanding of the organisation in which a specific participant worked. Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis and no participant was coerced in any way to participate. Participants were able to leave any questions unanswered that they did not feel comfortable answering and, in this way, the sensitivity of the disclosure of sexual identity could be respected. The participants also had to be given enough opportunity for expressing themselves. It is believed that this was the case, particularly because the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews allows for this.

4.6.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured in-depth interviews

The semi-structured in-depth interview is a versatile data collection method that allows vague responses to be cleared up and allows participants to elaborate on answers. Reliable information is obtained in semi-structured in-depth interviews, because follow-up questions may be asked. In semi-structured and or unstructured interviews, a given phenomenon can be explored in great depth and more extensively to reach an in-depth understanding (Kumar 2014:177; Mouton, 2009:157; Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014:12–16; Welman *et al* 2007:166–167).

As far as disadvantages are concerned, in-depth interviews are time-consuming and intensive, particularly if a researcher needs to go back for more information or requires detailed responses, which this researcher did. Although the flexibility of this method is viewed as an advantage, it does mean that questions are not always consistent across interviews, which may be regarded as a disadvantage. Because this study is not about consistency, but about each individuals' unique experience, inconsistency was not experienced as a disadvantage.

Participants do not enjoy anonymity with in-depth interviews and, when the researcher is dealing with sensitive issues and circumstances on which participants may not want to divulge information in a face-to-face situation, it may become an issue. Although anonymity could not be ensured in this study, because the researcher knew the

participants, confidentiality was maintained. The participants seemed at ease to speak face-to-face, although some did opt for the narrative instead of the in-depth interview. A number of potential participants, who agreed to participate in the research, did withdrew at a later stage and the fact that they did not want to divulge sensitive information could have been a reason (Mouton 2009:157; Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014:12–14; Welman *et al* 2007:166–167).

4.6.1.2 Process of the semi-structured in-depth interviews in this study

As Welman *et al* (2007:174–176) state, with semi-structured interviews, careful consideration needs to be given to the relation of the questions to the research problem. It is critical that the topic is researched before the questions are set. Thus, the questions were formulated only after the theoretical foundation and literature review had been completed.

During the preparation of interviews, the research problem was analysed and the researcher used deductive reasoning to identify themes that emerged from the theoretical foundation and the literature review. The interview questions were based on these themes.

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:284) points out that, in qualitative in-depth interviews, researchers are the research instruments themselves. In this way, they require a level of skill that will ensure that the interviews are conducted in a manner that aligns with best practice; that ethical considerations are kept in mind; and that the interviewer has the skill to extract the necessary information, while being sensitive to individual participants' needs. Researchers are required to use their intuition, probing without intimidating, leading or interrogating the participant. In this study, the researcher needed to be able to guide and steer the conversation to ensure that it remained focused. Based on her previous research experience, journalist experience and courses conducted in interviewing skills, she had the necessary skills and experience to conduct in-depth interviews to extrapolate sufficient depth and textual richness in the information and to compile full and deep descriptions of the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher prepared for the interviews by emailing a letter to the prospective participants in which she explained the nature and purpose of the study; stated that participation is voluntary and that all participants can withdraw from the study at any time; indicated that all information would remain confidential; scheduled the interviews at times

that suited the participants; and gave an indication of the expected duration of the interview. When the participant indicated that s/he was willing to be interviewed, the participant was given the opportunity to read the consent form, which had to be signed at the interview.

In total, ten interviews were conducted with participants who identified themselves as being gay. All these participants were professionals in varied fields. The face-to-face interviews lasted for between one hour and one and a half hours. Although the interviews were semi-structured, the participants were given the latitude to direct the interview in any direction and to frame their experience in their own way of understanding. Audio recordings were made of the interviews, which were transcribed for analysis purposes. In some cases, a follow-up interview was conducted after transcription of the responses.

All the interviews were conducted in Gauteng between June 2017 and February 2018. The interviews were conducted at a location that was most convenient and comfortable for the respondents. In this way, confidentiality could be ensured and the interview could be conducted in a space in which the participants were able to share their feelings, views and beliefs freely and honestly.

The transcribed data from each interview averaged 3000 words. Each interview was transcribed and coded by using open coding before the next interview took place. This enabled the researcher to identify themes that could be explored further in subsequent interviews and to go back to the participant to ask additional questions, if necessary. Although time consuming, this was seen as an advantage for reliability and validity (referred to as “trustworthiness” in the context of this qualitative study).

4.6.2 Narrative inquiry

The narrative inquiry technique, which involves storytelling, is about a participant retelling a story of an incident or happening in his/her life. Narrative inquiry positions individuals as “tellers of stories”: stories that relate to a time or episode in their lives that they sequence into a unique account of a given event. Participants write or provide reflective accounts of a given experience or event by discussing their feelings, beliefs and thoughts on it. Narratives work particularly well when conducting research on a sensitive topic. Stories or narratives are used as data for analysis in narrative inquiry. Furthermore, as stated by Bell (2002:207), “narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experiences/events by the imposition of

story structures. That is, we select those elements of an experience/event to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen experiences/events in ways that reflect the stories available to us".

Storytelling is an apt way of understanding identity and elements of identity, because it involves human communication and connections. Storytelling within itself is a re-enactment of a part of an individual's self, in this way; it is an identification of his/her identity and reality, which aligns with the purpose of this study. Moreover, in a true qualitative study conducted in a post-modern epoch, lived experiences cannot be captured in a direct and true manner. For this reason, personal narrative interviews, which could even be accompanied by diaries, pictures or other detailed glimpses of an individual's life experience, would best represent a detailed picture of an individual's experience (Bell 2002:207, Bryman & Bell 2014:366; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:281; Fouché & Schurink 2011:313; Kumar 2014:194; Mobley 2010; Pinegar & Daynes 2007:28–30).

4.6.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of narrative inquiry

Because a narrative inquiry has no structure, it is easy to lose focus and it is difficult to establish any type of reliability (Kumar 2014:194). Given that specific questions were asked to guide the narrative in this research – namely to discuss one negative and one positive disclosure experience – it maintained structure, while allowing storytelling. In terms of advantages, narratives are considered a powerful method of data collection in sensitive situations, such as individuals disclosing their sexual identity. Narratives can also be seen as therapeutic for those telling their story and they are, in fact, often used in therapy and or counselling sessions.

Narratives provide a depth of understanding, which, in turn, can be a productive way of making sense of a given situation. In the organisational context, sensemaking has a specific context, which Weick (2012) terms "organisational sense-making" (Bryman & Bell 2014:366). Waldeck (2007:409) explains, "… sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action". Sensemaking can happen in any setting or situation, whether people are acting within an organisational context or elsewhere. Sensemaking occurs when meanings materialise (Waldeck 2007:409) and, therefore, sensemaking can be viewed as giving meaning and making sense of significant experiences in the organisational context, such as disclosure of sexual identity. Sensemaking is ongoing

and significant experiences that enable people to shape and react to a particular experience.

4.6.2.2 Process of narrative inquiry in this study

In this study, narratives were obtained by asking participants to describe two personal incidents regarding their perceived experiences of disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues. In the first instance, they were asked to describe one incident of disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague that they perceived as having had a negative impact on their interaction behaviour with that colleague. In the second narrative, the participant was required to describe the perceived positive influence of the disclosure of his/her sexual identity on interaction behaviour. For an example of the instructions of the narrative inquiry, see the attached participant informed consent forms in Addendum D and the instructions for narrative inquiry in Addendum E.

Narratives were thought to add value to this study, because they were considered a valuable and powerful method of data collection of personal information, such as gay individuals' disclosure of their sexual identity to their colleagues within their organisations. Narratives can also be seen as therapeutic for those telling their story and providing depth of understanding for organisational sensemaking. Sometimes, being able to speak to someone whom they trust eases the burden of the story for the participants (Bryman & Bell 2014:366; Kumar 2014:194).

The narratives were collected from June 2017 to February 2018. A total number of 26 narratives were sent out to potential participants and multiple follow-ups were made. However, in the end, 11 of the 26 potential participants agreed to submit narratives and these narratives were utilised. The average length was 700 words per narrative. All participants, who were interviewed, were given the narrative instructions before they were interviewed. The researcher called additional participants, who were not part of the in-depth interviews, and talked them through the narrative inquiry process, after which they were contacted via electronic mail. Those participants, who indicated a willingness to participate in the study, received consent forms and the instructions via electronic mail. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, participants were informed that all responses and identities would remain confidential.

4.7 Data analysis method

In qualitative studies, there will inevitably be a large amount of data to be transcribed, refined, reduced, analysed and interpreted and ultimately presented as findings, regardless of the data collection method that a researcher has used (Bezuidenhout & Cronje 2014:228). There needs to be an in-depth data analysis process to ensure that the interpretation is rigorous and consists of detailed descriptions of meanings. In this study, thematic textual analysis was used as the data analysis method, open, axial and selective coding were also used.

4.7.1 Thematic textual analysis

Content analysis is associated with the analysis of data, such as transcripts from interviews and texts in documents that are coded and analysed as quantitative data. Textual analysis techniques are also used for content data, like interviews, but they are used to analyse qualitative data only. During World War II (1939–1945), content analysis was used in the analysis of propaganda and newspaper and radio content. Content analysis was quantitatively based, until the German sociologist and cultural critic, Siegfried Kracauer, argued against the analytical constraints of quantitative content analysis and provided arguments for a more humanistic approach to the analysis of media content in the form of qualitative textual analysis. Therefore, from this point on and for the purpose of this qualitative study, content analysis will be termed *textual analysis*. Moreover, it should be noted that the terms “qualitative content analysis” and “textual analysis” are used interchangeable. These explanations imply that content analysis denotes quantitative studies and textual analysis denotes qualitative studies. This is a qualitative study only and the texts of the narratives and in-depth interviews were analysed as the basis for developing themes to represent the self-preservation communication strategies, reality-altering event, re-communication and the re-communication conceptual framework (Bezuidenhout & Cronje 2014:234; Neuman 2000:293; Smith 1988:263; Wimmer & Dominick 2004:140).

Textual analysis is a more holistic term than narrative analysis, because, unlike narrative analysis, textual analysis includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. In this study, the collective term *thematic textual analysis* – which includes both content analysis and narrative analysis – will be used in the discussion on data analysis. Therefore, even if other authors refer to these methods as “content analysis” or “narrative analysis” – for consistency and a sharing of meaning, this study refers to the collective term as *thematic*

textual analysis. Thematic textual analysis was used to develop the themes that assisted in evolving the anticipated self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and re-communication. The qualitative thematic textual analysis, which was used as the data analysis method, is explained next.

In order to extrapolate the meaning from the data, it was necessary to identify recurring themes or patterns within the given genre that was to be analysed – in this case, in-depth semi-structured interviews, narratives, the theoretical foundation and literature review. It was important to group data and to categorise this data into manageable themes or sub-themes, so that meaning could be shared and extrapolated in the findings. Sub-themes were derived and assertions consistent with these sub-themes emerged into broad themes. Out of these broad themes, patterns emerged and assertions consistent with the grouping of the broad themes developed into four dominant themes.

There are different types of textual analysis. One such type is thematic textual analysis, which was utilised in this study. In thematic textual analysis, the unit of analysis is actually the theme selected, where a theme is an assertion about a subject matter. The theme is one of the most useful units of textual analysis, because it analyses and assesses issues and attitudes most effectively. In thematic textual analysis, the themes chosen become the unit of analysis. Each sub-theme falls under a larger theme, in this case termed a “broad theme” and each broad theme fell under a dominant theme. There were four dominant themes justified in terms of what constituted part of that particular theme and the broad themes and sub-themes that fell under it (Berelson 1952:138–139; Bezuidenhout & Cronje 2014:235, Budd, Thorp & Donohew 1967:47–48; Du Plooy 2009:152; Krippendorf 1980:49).

Thematic units are repeated patterns or ideas. Hence, the researcher utilised open coding to extrapolate repeated patterns and ideas (if they did arise) from the transcriptions, after which recurring sub-themes were grouped together by means of axial coding. When these recurring themes arose, the researcher needed to utilise selective coding to draft definitions for each theme, in order to ensure a shared understanding of the theme. Out of these broad themes, four dominant themes emerged. Firstly, there appeared to be specific elements that influenced participants to either disclose or not-disclose their sexual identity. Out of a collection of other themes, there were specific self-preservation communication strategies that participants used to either

avoid disclosing and/or to conceal their sexual identity, until they reached a point at which they chose to disclose. If self-preservation communication strategies remained their mode of communication regarding their sexual identity, the process of disclosure and re-communication did not come to fruition. However, even in non-communication, there was still communication by means of the self-preservation communication strategies and the strategic interpersonal communication it requires. However, if they proceeded to utilise strategic and/or spontaneous communication, either by themselves or by others, to reveal their sexual identity to colleagues, then re-communication as the fourth dominant theme would occur. In each instance of disclosure, this was either perceived as a positive altering of the participant's interaction behaviour with colleagues or a negative one, dependent on the colleague's responses. The dominant, broad and sub-themes are discussed in the findings in Chapters 5 and 6 (Budd *et al* 1967:33; Du Plooy 2009:191; Smith 1988:263; Wimmer & Dominick 2004:149).

Having explored the broad category of textual analysis and themes as a unit of analysis, the nuances of qualitative textual analysis are discussed. Firstly, qualitative textual analysis makes impressionistic judgments about the phenomena under investigation and, for this reason, it is important to have co-coders, so that a sharing of meaning may be maintained and increase the trustworthiness in qualitative textual analysis studies. The basic unit of analysis is seen as more complicated in qualitative analysis, where themes can be more complex to define, because they are not numerically quantified, but rather defined in-depth (Babbie & Mouton 2001:383; Berelson 1952:124–125, 133). In this study, two co-coders with Doctorates in Communication Science were used for co-coding purposes. Qualitative researchers of textual analysis will opt for depth of interpretation, looking at a range of observations and information, even if this means that a different judgement may be reached for the same context.

Most data analysis methods have advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages of textual analysis is that it is used to gain a better understanding of behavioural patterns, values and attitudes, which align with the purpose of this study. Researchers using this method need to note that textual analysis involves accepting of unstructured material. It is inexpensive and, therefore, economical and it can cope with large volumes of data. In textual analysis, data is studied in the setting and context in which it exists. Qualitative textual analysis does not break data into quantifiable units: data is interpreted and thick descriptions extrapolated. The real meaning of data is not

overlooked, because qualitative textual analysis is concerned with capturing the richness of text, interpreting findings and describing the unique complexities of a given data set. In qualitative textual analysis, broad themes are identified and the emphasis is on the meaning of latent content, which makes the interpretation richer. It allows for flexibility in considering latent and manifest content within messages (Babbie & Mouton 2001:392–393; Berger 1991:28–29; Du Plooy 2009:166; Frey *et al* 1991:213).

Wimmer and Dominick (2004:144–145) observe that, as with all techniques, there are limitations concerning textual analysis, one of which is that there may be a lack of data available on certain content or themes. It is also time consuming, because of the examination of various categories in large volumes of content, which was the case in this study. Another limitation is that findings are limited to the related categories and definitions used for the analysis and different researchers may use different categories and definitions. However, this was not a concern in this study, because of the interpretivist nature of research, which deals with the individual participant's perceptions and experiences and thus is not for generalisation.

The following process, as set out by Bezuidenhout and Cronje (2014:236–243), was used in the data analysis of this study:

Step 1: Preparing the Data

Where agreed to interviews were recorded and all were transcribed to ensure complete records. Narratives were written and collected by means of electronic mail or obtained physically. All the data was used to prepare the analysis.

Step 2: Defining the coding unit to be analysed

This step involves the ordering of material and identifying of specific codes that define words and concepts, as well as linking these words and concepts directly to the various sub-themes. This was done by using open coding by reading through the transcribed data numerous times, creating labels for smaller units of data. Axial coding was then used to group together possible concepts that could have been indicators of specific sub-themes that might have been related. Out of the axial coding, the concepts were grouped together as sub-themes and broad themes were developed by means of selective coding. A list of the codes is given in the addenda as Addendum A.

Step 3: Developing themes and a coding scheme or conceptual framework

This step refers to the development of the themes and sub-themes, which was developed from the theoretical foundation, the literature review and the researcher's insights from deductive reasoning. Dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes emerged from the data collection itself. From this, a re-communication conceptual framework was compiled (Bezuidenhout & Cronje 2014:238), which is represented in Chapter 7 (Figure 7.6).

Step 4: Testing the coding scheme on a sample text

This is linked to co-coding with an expert in the field or someone from the population to ensure a shared meaning of the theme definitions that all participants and readers of the study would generally understand. Two experienced independent co-coders with doctoral degrees in Communication Studies and extensive experience in coding as a qualitative data analysis technique were involved in the data analysis process, in order to verify the findings and to increase the trustworthiness, dependability and credibility of the study. Feedback was obtained on the dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes from the co-coders and consensus was reached on the final themes and sub-themes. The co-coders also assisted in ensuring that researcher bias was lessened towards the risk of only observing things that would support the theoretical argument. Co-coders were used to aid in ensuring that the questions and instructions were clear, concise and understandable to all possible participants. The co-coders looked at all the questions for the semi-structured in-depth interviews and raised concerns.

Step 5: Coding all text

Thematic coding, which was used in this study, is defined by Bezuidenhout and Cronje (2014:241) as "… a process of data reduction by means of identifying themes. In thematic coding you often use deductive coding by using a list of themes known or anticipated to be found in the data, usually derived from your literature review". This was done as three themes were deductively used to set up the interview questions and, although these altered slightly when the dominant themes emerged and a fourth one was developed, the structuring for the questions was helpful for grouping themes in the coding process. As discussed in Step 2, open coding, axial coding and selective coding were utilised.

Step 6: Assessing coding consistency

As discussed in Step 4.

Step 7: Drawing conclusions from the coded data (interpreting the data)

This refers to the meanings that the researcher derived from the themes and the meanings in the text being analysed. It is important for the researcher to describe how the reconstructed meaning from the text was linked to the broader context, which is done in Chapters 5 and 6.

Step 8: Reporting on methods and findings

Chapters 5 and 6 report on the methods and findings.

4.7.2 Coding

Open coding, axial coding and selective coding were utilised to assist in developing the dominant, broad and sub-themes from the thematic textual analysis. The coding assisted in finding the patterns and interconnections of concepts to one another and the refinement of a given theme or the condensing of one theme into another. In order to find meaning in data that is not always explicit, researchers commonly employ methods to code the data (Blair 2015:14–15).

Open, axial and selective coding was selected for this study. Although open, axial and selective coding emerges from grounded theory, as characterised by Corbin and Strauss (1990:12–14), it is particularly relevant in thematic analysis. Open coding is the first step in the coding process and requires the researcher to work through the transcribed data line-by-line, seeking for similarity in words or phrases. In other words, it is the stage where the researcher identifies specific themes and concepts, which are units of meaning and usually just words and/or a short sequence of words. Every word or phrase that arises and is similar to a particular theme is labelled. Open coding is related to emergent themes and in post open coding, there is a transition to axial coding.

Axial coding utilises both deductive and inductive reasoning. The axial coding process involves refining, differentiating and categorising themes. The themes most relevant to the research questions are selected (Corbin & Strauss 1990:12–14; Flick 2018:457–459; Williams & Moser 2019:49–53). Williams and Moser (2019:49) explain, "… as the researcher reviews the thematic material collected through open coding, the materials must be examined in the context of inductive and deductive analysis". Selective coding

traverses to the next level and the researcher uses a higher level of abstraction and further refines and integrates themes for the selective coding process (Corbin & Strauss 1990:12–14; Flick 2018; Williams & Moser 2019:49–53).

The coding system was guided by themes from the literature, interviews and narratives. It should be noted that, prior to the coding process and as extrapolated from the researcher's own insights and experiences in this particular area, the researcher grouped questions into the following four themes, based on deductive reasoning when conducting the interviews:

- Theme A: Questions related to your ways of communicating to your colleagues before you disclosed to them that you are gay
- Theme B: Questions related to the way you told colleagues you are gay within your organisation
- Theme C: Questions related to any perceived shifts in communication between you and a colleague or colleagues that you feel you have experienced after telling them that you are gay.
- Theme D: Questions related to disclosure and your organisation

Therefore, when conducting open coding on the initial transcribed data, the four broad themes were kept in mind for the grouping of information (Theme D later became merged into other themes). However, given that the coding process is organic as the data analysis progressed, these emerging dominant themes also metamorphosed and a new theme emerged inductively, as extrapolated from the data – that of elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure.

Open coding was conducted on the initial transcribed data. Firstly, because of the deductive reasoning used to group questions, the researcher took words/phrases/sentences and grouped them into four letters as follows:

- A: Questions related to your ways of communicating to your colleagues before you disclosed to them that you are gay;
- B: Questions related to the way you told colleagues you are gay within your organisation;

- C: Questions related to any perceived shifts in communication between you and a colleague or colleagues that you feel you have experienced after telling them that you are gay;
- O: Questions related to disclosure and the individual's organisation, as well as words/phrase/sentences that did not fit into the previous themes.

Although the questions were grouped in the interviews, because a semi-structured interview is a spontaneous process, and the narratives were also conducted and not all sentences/phrases/words were relevant to the theme, the open coding was conducted across all themes, looking for similarity and reoccurring patterns. In this way, the words and phrases were grouped into A, B, C or O for the dominant themes. Once they were grouped into these sections, the researcher took all the words and phrases in A, tried to connect and interconnect these patterns, and grouped them into sub-themes by means of axial coding. The same was done with B, C and O. Once grouped, the open coding was coded with the letter and a number to denote an overlap to a broader theme, e.g. A1 and anything that was similar, interconnected and connected would then also be A1, but would get a secondary number, e.g. A1.1 and A1.2, and others would be A2.1 and A2.2. In order to accommodate the multiple sub-themes, the second number was added for ease of reference. This coding is depicted in the addenda as Addendum A. Once all the A's were grouped into sub-themes, broader themes developed out of this collection of sub-themes. For example, A1.1–A1.5 dealt with elements that demonstrated gay individuals' avoidance of disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues. Examples included, but were not limited to, gay individuals avoiding discussions about personal information with their colleagues, or avoiding or deflecting questions about their personal lives. This also includes gay individuals avoiding or concealing being gay, being selective of to whom they choose to disclose, or telling tell half-truths – even lying – about the fact that they are gay, even if only for a short period. Therefore, A1.1–A1.5 made up the broader theme termed *Avoidance Strategies* and this broad theme was coded as A1. See Addendum A for clarity.

It should be noted that, during the coding process and through the refinement and synthesis process of the selective coding and the nuances of the findings, the original, evident themes were altered to the version currently in use and being proposed. On finalisation, these themes were termed (i) elements that influence disclosure or non-

disclosure; (ii) self-preservation communication strategies; (iii) reality-altering event; and (iv) re-communication.

Moreover, many of the themes were then refined, whereby themes were often collapsed into one another through the axial coding process and when realising that there was an overlap between the responses and the themes. For example; forming friendships and forming close bonds were initially separated into two separate broad themes, with the understanding that the parameters of a friendship and getting on well with a colleague differed. However, in analysing the data, it become clear there was much overlap and these two were combined to both be included in the disclosure motivators theme.

Addendum A presents a summary of the dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis conducted by means of textual analysis, coupled with the coding of the data into sub-themes, which resulted in emergent themes and culminated in the grouping of the themes into the four dominant themes that were to be the key concepts in the conceptual framework of re-communication. Each of the broad themes was defined to aid in the co-coding process to ensure shared meaning.

It should be noted that a specific pattern was also noted in the dominant themes in the reality-altering event. In most cases, there were elements of some sort that influenced a participant's decision disclosing or not disclosing his/her sexual identity to colleagues in the organisational context. In some cases, after considering the element(s) that may influence their disclosure. For example, if a participant deemed someone as high risk to disclose to in terms of possible rejection by a colleague or social isolation, then s/he may have decided to continue concealing their sexual identity to that colleague, in which case the re-communication process does not progress to the communication disclosure stage.

4.8 Trustworthiness of the study

Bryman and Bell (2014:44) explain some qualitative researchers believe that reliability and validity in the quantitative form should still be used for qualitative studies. Other writers suggest that reliability and validity negate the purpose of qualitative research, because they imply that results can be generalised and that one single account is feasible, which implies that absolute truths can be discovered. It is important to keep in mind that the purposes of quantitative and qualitative research are not the same. Qualitative research does not generalise findings: the aim is to promote understanding

of a particular phenomenon (Koonin 2014:258). Within interpretivist qualitative studies, it is argued that using reliability and validity as the means to ensure feasibility does not provide the type of trustworthiness required within qualitative studies. The repetition of a qualitative study is not possible, because, by its very nature, qualitative research is focused on the individuals' unique individual experience – not to be objectively measurable (Koonin 2014:258).

The leading authors in the approach of evaluating qualitative analysis by using alternative feasibility terms are Lincoln and Guba (1985:289–323), who argue that within qualitative research, there are four criteria that must be used, in order to ensure feasibility of a qualitative study. These four areas of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Many positivists reject the interpretivist paradigm of research, arguing that such studies cannot be proved reliable and valid. In turn, many non-positivists (to be termed *naturalists* for the purpose of this section) adopt an interpretive method of inquiry and distance themselves from the positivist wording of reliability and validity, instead adopting the concept of trustworthiness as the holistic means of measuring reliability and validity in qualitative studies. However, it should be noted that many qualitative researchers still use the terms reliability and validity, although they apply them differently. However, due to the interpretivist paradigm in which this study is rooted, qualitative and interpretivist accepted terms and criteria linked to trustworthiness were applied in this study (Lincoln & Guba 1985:289–323; Shenton 2004).

Lincoln and Guba (1985:289–323) state that the basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is linked to the inquirer's ability to persuade his/her audience and him/herself that the findings of a particular study are worthy of attention and credibility. Traditional paradigms use controls and randomisation and, therefore, they require multiple observers to agree on a phenomenon as their means of objectivity of collective judgement. This is technically inter-subjective agreement, because the conventional inquirer is stating that reality is known, as if it is predictable and the same across multiple observers, which negates the interpretivist standpoint of reality not being objective, but relativistic. Therefore, this entire traditional observation of hypothesising and determining control measures and identifying dependent and independent variables, negates the entire principle of naturalist, interpretive and qualitative research and, therefore, it is not well suited to this study. Instead, the criteria for trustworthiness, as described by Lincoln and Guba, are

better suited for this study. As previously stated, credibility is the first of the four criteria to determine trustworthiness. Transferability is the second, dependability the third and confirmability the fourth (Collis & Hussey 2003:278–279; Lincoln & Guba 1985: 289–323; Shenton 2004).

Credibility, which refers to the accuracy of the interpretation of the data, entails the accuracy of the interpretation of the data from the participants' original data. In the context of this study, it is about the way the participants' information from the in-depth semi-structured interviews, narratives, theoretical foundation and literature review were transcribed in an accurate manner and the themes that were identified and described. Apart from the researcher spending prolonged periods with the participants, credibility also increases through the triangulation of data collection methods. Within this study, both of these elements of credibility were utilised, as discussed under the data collection method, where it is noted that extensive time was spent with each of the participants in the in-depth interviews. Data collection methods were also triangulated, since both in-depth interviews and narrative inquiry were utilised. Furthermore, the researcher used a purposive sample, in order to ensure that the selected participants had a trusting relationship with the researcher, which, in turn ensured more in-depth responses (Bezuidenhout 2012; Collis & Hussey 2003:278–279; Lincoln & Guba 1985: 289–323; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:419; Shenton 2004).

Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2014:44–45) add that credibility is further established by ensuring research always follows good practice and that the findings are submitted to those who acted as participants to check for accuracy, thereby validating responses. – This is termed *participant validation*. Koonin (2014:258) continues to state that, when findings are accurate and believable to the participants, it would increase credibility. Hence, when participants see the study as a reflection of their given perspectives, then the credibility of the study is elevated. In order to increase credibility this way, the researcher conducted follow-up conversations in some regard and, once the findings were written, the researcher sent them to participants for two reasons. Firstly, to indicate whether they felt that it was an accurate reflection of what they had communicated and if the findings resonated with their experience as a gay individual; and secondly to ensure that they were comfortable that their information that was quoted was not recognisable and encased within the rest of the study.

Another technique that has been recommended for validity of qualitative research is triangulation of methods – i.e. the use of more than one method to crosschecked results, thereby enhancing reliability and validity. Bryman and Bell (2014:45) state, " … qualitative research typically involves the intensive, in-depth study of a small group of individuals sharing certain characteristic. Qualitative findings therefore tend to be orientated to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world being studied".

Transferability is based on the application of the findings in a similar situation and obtaining similar results to permit generalisation within an approach that does not lend itself to generalised findings (Koonin 2014:258). In other words, it is the degree to which the results and analysis can be applied beyond the boundaries of the specific study. Although the context of the study is gay individuals within the organisational context, this theory could be applied to multiple reality-altering contexts. Therefore, it is hoped that the re-communication conceptual framework could be utilised to assist other gay individuals outside of the participants in this study, as well as other individuals experiencing reality-altering events to make sense of their experience (Bezuidenhout 2012; Collis & Hussey 2003:278–279; Lincoln & Guba 1985:289–323; Shenton 2004).

Dependability deals with the key elements of the research process and asks if the elements are systematic, rigorous and well documented. Dependability is about the quality of the process of integration between data collection methods, data analysis and theory generation. As was established, a triangulation of data collection methods was used. The data was analysed by using thematic textual analysis, in order to increase dependability, and was coded by means of open, axial and selective coding. Moreover, co-coders were used to increase shared meaning of the themes and sub-themes (Bezuidenhout 2012; Bryman & Bell 2014:45; Collis & Hussey 2003:278–279; Koonin 2014:259; Lincoln & Guba 1985:289–332; Schurink *et al* 2011:420; Shenton 2004).

Finally, *confirmability* refers to how well the collected data supports the findings and interpretation of the study and how well the findings flow from the data. It requires the researcher to have described the research process fully. With regard to confirmability, co-coders were used for the qualitative thematic textual analysis, in order to assess the accuracy of the definitions of each theme category in terms of how understandable the category definitions are to others as discussed previously. The purpose was to ensure

that co-coders understand the definitions of the themes easily and to establish shared meaning. It is theorised that the selected methodology attained the desired information to have identified and described the elements influencing disclosure and non-disclosure, self-preservation communication strategies, reality-altering events and re-communication.

These results can be confirmed by connecting the established literature to the questions asked and the findings and interpretation it examines. It requires the researcher to describe the research process in full, in order to allow others to scrutinise the process that was followed. With regard to confirmability, co-coders were utilised, in order to assess the accuracy of the definitions of each theme in terms of how understandable the theme definitions were to others. The co-coders formed part of the coding process, but co-coding only enhanced confirmability when the co-coders agreed with the conclusions drawn from the data. The themes were based on the theoretical foundation and literature review, semi-structured interviews and narratives. The methodology selected assisted the researcher in attaining the desired data obtained. The collected data was used to identify and describe the elements that influence disclosure and non-disclosure, self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event (disclosure) and re-communication of the re-communication conceptual framework. These results were confirmable by connecting the established literature to the questions asked and with the findings and interpretations (Bezuidenhout 2012; Bryman & Bell 2014:45; Collis & Hussey 2003:278–279; Lincoln & Guba 1985:289–323; Schurink *et al* 2011:420; Shenton 2004; Wimmer & Dominick 2011:171–175).

4.9 Ethical considerations

Bertram and Christiansen (2014:65) explain that ethics is about behaviour and the ability to decipher between right and wrong, particularly when dealing with human beings as part of a study. It is even more essential for the researcher to respect and protect ethical considerations of privacy, confidentiality and human dignity. Louw (2014:272–273) asserts that researchers have a moral responsibility to act with honesty and integrity in all aspects of the research process and that each researcher needs to take on an ethical stance to the research process. Welman *et al* (2007:181) elucidate the importance of ethical behaviour in research by giving the following three stages in which ethical considerations come into play in a research project: (i) when participants are recruited;

(ii) during the intervention and or the measurement procedure to which the participants are subjected; and (iii) in the release of the results obtained.

Although Welman *et al* (2007:181) specifically list the three stages in which ethical considerations come into play, Louw (2014:264) and Kumar (2014:284–286) list a number of important ethical issues that must be considered when dealing with participants, such as in this case for interviews. To this end, the following measures were put into place to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner by including the collective reasoning of Welman *et al* (2007:181), Louw (2014:264) and Kumar (2014:284–286), based both on the research stages and on the ethical issues related to the use of participants:

- ***Informed consent***

  All the participants signed informed consent forms, which explained the study; assured them of their privacy and confidentiality, and no participant's real name(s) or defining features were used. Consent was also given to record the interviews. (Examples of the consent forms are attached as Addenda B and D). Information was not shared outside of the research. Moreover, it should be noted that, as the study evolved, some information regarding the study shifted slightly, e.g. the title of the study. However, at the time of the interviews, it had been established and accurate and there were no substantive changes.

- ***Collecting data from participants***

  Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any given time, without having to provide an explanation. They were asked to select the venue that they felt was the most private and the most comfortable for them. They could also decide on a time that was most suitable for them, in order to ensure that the interview would yield the most in-depth results. Furthermore, the privacy of participants was respected and, in cases where the participants revealed information that could have personally damaging consequences (e.g. any personal issues linked to being gay), the information was kept private and confidential.

- ***Dealing with sensitive information***

  Participation in this study occurred on a voluntary basis and no participant was coerced in any way to participate. Participants were able to leave any questions unanswered that they did not feel comfortable answering.

- ***Providing incentives***

  In this study, no incentives were provided and participants were informed of this.

- ***Avoiding harm***

  Any form of emotional, physical or psychological harm to the participants was as far as possible avoided. Because the researcher conducting the in-depth interviews is an experienced researcher, a level of professionalism was maintained, in an attempt to avoid any harm to participants. It was recognised that some of the disclosures could have caused emotional responses in the individuals, but all information was on a voluntary basis and, if a participant did not feel comfortable with a particular question, s/he was not required to answer.

- ***Confidentiality versus anonymity***

  Although anonymity could not be assured for this study (the researcher was able to identify the participants), all information was treated with the strictest confidentiality, of which participants were assured. Confidentiality was obtained by not referring to participants by their names, their addresses, their places of work, colleagues, or their link to a specific social circle. All participants' records were kept confidential. As a result, none of the participants' identities or any information that might be linked to them was revealed in this study. Only the researcher had access to the identities of participants and all identifying factors were removed from the data before it was revealed to the co-coders or any other role players involved in the study. Direct quotations were used in the findings section, the participants signed permission for these. The direct quotations were used to ensure that the participants' exact words did not lose their essence and authenticity. However, it should be noted that, for ease of reading, spelling errors occurring in the narratives were corrected. Given that non-verbal communication and/or gestures were not analysed, instances where the participant stuttered or stumbled on words, filler sounds, such as ah, oh, umm *etc.,* and repetition of words were deleted. Although it was limited as far as possible, some minor editing had to be made at times, either for confidentiality purposes or because

it was grammatically problematic. These incidences are indicated with square brackets where they appear. If sections were left out, as is normal practice, an ellipsis was utilised. Participants were sent the final version prior to submission and asked if the quotes and commentary resonated with their interviews and narratives. In addition, they were asked if the findings resonated with their experience of gay individuals' disclosure.

- ***Deception***

  No deception occurred in this study. All participants were given a detailed explanation of what the research involved and why the researcher was researching this particular topic. Furthermore, the ethical clearance went through the Ethics Committee of UNISA, as required. The reference number is 2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_008.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher proposed a rationalisation for the use of the qualitative research design and explained the appropriateness of the research paradigm to the study. A qualitative design was found to be the most relevant for the purpose of obtaining rich data for an in-depth understanding of the perceived influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour in an organisation and the individual's perception of the shift in interaction behaviour with his/her colleagues and his/her perception of the organisation. The use of a qualitative design also aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, where one of the strategies of inquiry is phenomenology, which was also the strategy of inquiry used in this study.

A non-probability, purposive sample was utilised and this sample was obtained from friends, colleagues and acquaintances with whom this researcher had established trusting relationships over a number of years. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, it was important that a trust relationship existed and, therefore, such a sampling method was deemed appropriate. Since gaining an in-depth understanding obtained through rich data and in-depth knowledge of the construct of re-communication being labelled was required, a smaller sample could be utilised: the aim was not to generalise research results to a broad population, but rather to expose an in-depth perception of individuals' unique experiences. Saturation point was reached in terms of data collection and methodological triangulation was used throughout the study to increase its transferability

and credibility (the qualitative means of referring to internal and external validity), the advantages and disadvantages of which were discussed in this chapter.

The chapter culminated in an explanation of the data analysis method, namely thematic textual analysis and the coding procedures, which applied open, axial and selective coding. Only the main features were covered in this chapter, as the details of the analysis are given in the next chapter. The question of validity and reliability in relation to qualitative research in the form of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were explored, as well as the ethical issues that were considered.

The next chapter consists of the presentation of the findings of the study according to identified themes and sub-themes. This was developed by using a conceptual framework for re-communication that was drawn deductively from the theoretical foundation and the literature review and refined by means of inductive reasoning in the data collection process by means of insights obtained from the participants. The purpose of the next chapter is to explain the findings and interpretation of the first two dominant themes.

CHAPTER 5: RE-COMMUNICATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ELEMENTS INFLUENCING DISLCOSURE DECISIONS AND SELF-PRESERVATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Research is to see what everyone else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought. ~ Szent-Gyorgyi

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, all aspects of the methodology were explained, as well as the way in which the themes were extrapolated from the data collected and developed, defined and categorised by using thematic textual analysis. Out of this extrapolation, four dominant themes emerged, each with broader themes and multiple sub-themes. The dominant themes were (i) elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure; (ii) self-preservation communication strategies; (iii) the reality-altering event (disclosure); and (iv) re-communication.

The findings of this study and their interpretation are divided into two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6). Chapter 5 presents the findings of the first two dominant themes (elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure and self-preservation communication strategies) and their related themes and sub-themes extrapolated from the thematic textual analysis. Chapter 6 is the presentation of the findings of the remaining two dominant themes, namely the reality-altering event and re-communication, which is the perceived change in communication after a reality-altering event.

The purpose of Chapter 5 firstly is to provide thick descriptions of the elements that participants perceive as influencing their decisions to disclose or not to disclose their sexual identity to their colleagues. Secondly, the chapter aims at providing thick descriptions of the communication strategies (referred to as *self-preservation communication strategies*) used by participants while determining if or how to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues. These elements and communication strategies, in turn, form part of the re-communication conceptual framework (the two dominant themes discussed in Chapter 6 are the remaining two concepts of the re-communication

conceptual framework) being posited. These themes and the resultant findings fulfil the aim of this study, namely to develop a communication conceptual framework for a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon termed *re-communication* (to be discussed in Chapter 6). A further aim of the study is to provide thick descriptions of how, in any reality-altering event, either strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual, who experienced a reality-altering event, or by persons or forms of communication external to the individual.

Within the context of this study, the disclosure becomes the reality-altering event. However, it should be noted that, as discussed in this chapter, in the first two concepts of the re-communication conceptual framework, the locus of control of the communication lies with the gay individuals. Firstly, the elements that influence a gay individual's decision to disclose or not-disclose his/her sexual identity to colleagues are elements that influence the gay individuals themselves. Secondly, the communication strategies used to avoid disclosing or concealing a sexual identity, termed *self-preservation communication strategies,* are selected and utilised by the gay individuals. However, in the final two concepts of the re-communication conceptual framework – the actual reality-altering event (disclosure of sexual identity) and re-communication – the locus of control around disclosure and the perceived influence on interaction behaviour can either lie with the gay individuals themselves, or it can be externally located with someone else disclosing the sexual identity of the gay individual.

This chapter commences with the core conjectures of an interpretivist paradigm, as discussed in Chapter 1, in relation to the goals of the study. This is followed by the presentation of the results of the first dominant theme, namely elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure. These elements either encourage or discourage gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues. Some of the elements can serve as both elements that encourage and discourage disclosure, depending on the context. This is followed by a presentation of the second dominant theme, namely the self-preservation communication strategies. These are communication strategies used by gay individuals while they are still avoiding disclosure of their sexual identity, concealing their sexual identity, or deciding how or if they want to tell a colleague that they are gay.

The dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes are contextualised in relation to the theoretical foundation (Chapter 2) and the literature review (Chapter 3), extrapolated from the data that was analysed by means of a thematic textual analysis, as covered in the chapter on research design and methodology (Chapter 4). The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings discussed in this chapter.

5.2 Core conjectures from an interpretivist paradigm

As indicated in Chapter 1, for interpretivists, the social world is constructed (made) – not discovered (found) – and accordingly social reality is seen as a human construction (*Chapter 1. An orientation to organisational communication* [2007]; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:21; Hughes 2012; Kroeze 2012; Schwandt 1998:221–223). Interpretivist epistemology focuses on the social meaning that individuals assign to their interaction behaviour (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:20). It was argued that the ontological perspective of interpretivists is cognitive or "mentalist". This means that knowledge is viewed as a transactional process, where reality is socially constructed and negotiated through each individual's way of ascribing meaning to his/her social reality. Knowledge has to be interpreted within a particular context and, therefore, interpretivists believe that there are multiple forms of knowledge (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2010:20; Open University 2019). Within the context of this study, it is posited that reality is socially constructed for all individuals in the organisational context showcased in this study. These co-constructed social realities are based on various factors, such as individuals' backgrounds, interactions with others in both their personal and professional context, and their previous experiences of disclosing their sexual identity.

Moreover, each gay individual, who participated in this study, negotiated and co-constructed social realities with others, which was influenced by each individual's own personal social reality. Each of these co-constructed social realities between participants' and their colleagues were unique and co-constructed, based on the interaction behaviour between the given colleagues and each participant, as well as the participants' personal reality.

Based on the results, it is posited that individuals can operate within multiple co-constructed social realities with various colleagues, depending on, in this case, the participants' experiences and perceptions of the colleagues to whom they are disclosing and their own experiences and perceptions of the disclosure of their sexual identity in

their organisational contexts. Co-constructed social realities are formed through the interaction behaviour and subsequent negotiation of the rules of engagement of a relationship between the gay individuals and their colleagues. This directly aligns with the interpretivist epistemological and ontological positions, where it is posited that individuals' assign social meaning to interaction behaviour and that the shared meaning in these co-constructed social realities is a negotiated transactional process that exists within the organisational context in which the interaction behaviour develops.

Based on the findings, it is proposed that disclosure influences the interaction behaviour between the gay individuals and the colleagues to whom they disclose. Disclosure also cause an alteration in the co-constructed social realities between the gay individuals and their colleagues, going from a position of not knowing an individual is gay to knowing. Therefore, the co-constructed social reality alters from a co-constructed social reality in which the colleagues have either not known that the participant is gay or suspected, without being sure, to a co-constructed social reality in which the gay individual's true sexual identity is known. Therefore, based on the new information of the true sexual identity of the gay individual, the co-constructed social reality between these individuals should have altered. The reasons for selecting symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism as the theoretical foundation (Chapter 2) and the selected literature reviewed (Chapter 3) are contextualised in this chapter in relation to the findings and interpretation of the first two dominant themes and their resultant broad themes and sub-themes.

Firstly, the meaning ascribed to the disclosure of sexual identity and the use of specific language used by the participants and their colleagues in the various communication forms in the re-communication conceptual framework, directly aligns with the meaning of symbolic interactionism, as defined in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2). This study explored the perceived shifts in interaction behaviour between, in this case, gay individuals and the colleagues to whom their sexual identity has been disclosed within their organisational contexts. All of this aligns with the conjectures of both symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2: Symbolic interactionism and Section 2.3: Social constructionism), where language and meaning are key elements of symbolic interactionism and social constructionism. It also aligns with the findings, in that the meaning – conveyed via language and symbols – which gay individuals ascribe to their communication and disclosure experiences with colleagues, influence the forms of

communication in the re-communication conceptual framework, including the reality-altering event itself.

The analysis and presentation of the findings in this chapter are supported by direct quotations of participants, as well as the alignment of the findings with the theoretical foundation (Chapter 2) and the literature review (Chapter 3) to the first two dominant themes (elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure and self-preservation communication strategies). The study focuses on the interaction behaviour and co-constructed social realities gay individuals perceive that they share with their colleagues during the self-preservation communication stage, during disclosure and post-disclosure. (It is critical to note that the purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework for a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon – that of re-communication – and to explore the perceived alteration in interaction behaviour after gay individuals disclose their sexual identity to colleagues in their organisational contexts). In this chapter, the aforementioned focus is analysed, in order to present the interpretation of the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure and the way gay individuals' communicate while keeping their sexual identity concealed, avoiding disclosure or deciding how or if to disclose to colleagues that they are gay. As previously indicated, the following chapter (Chapter 6) deals with the reality-altering event in this context and the participants' perceptions of how and if the interaction behaviour between themselves and the colleagues to whom they have disclosed has altered post-disclosure of their sexual identity (i.e.re-communication).

Collectively, the elements that influence disclosure and non-disclosure, self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and re-communication experiences of the participants shape the meaning that they ascribe to the disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues within an organisational context. The first two aspects of the re-communication conceptual framework are discussed in the following sections.

5.3 Re-communication conceptual framework

It is purported that, when people work together, they may make assumptions about their colleagues' sexual identity, which, in turn, may influence the way in which they interact with these colleagues. If the assumption is made that someone is heterosexual, a social reality is co-constructed in which the gay colleague is perceived as being heterosexual, because of heteronormativity, and others will interact with him/her accordingly. The

reality-altering event occurs when this colleague discloses his/her true sexual identity to colleagues. This is an ongoing reality-altering event, because each time a gay individual discloses that they are gay to a colleague, it involves a different experience that will garner different perceptions from the gay individuals. An individual communicating that they are gay, alters the co-constructed social reality in which the colleague wrongfully assumed that the gay person is heterosexual and interacted with him/her accordingly, and the gay individual reinforced this reality by not revealing his/her sexual identity. As a result of the disclosure, the co-constructed social reality between the gay individual and the colleague to whom s/he has disclosed is altered, from a co-constructed social reality in which the colleague either did not know the participant was gay or suspected as much, but was not sure, to a co-constructed social reality in which the gay individual's true sexual identity is known. Based on the new information of the true sexual identity of the gay individual, the co-constructed social reality between these individuals should have altered.

During the data analysis process, it became clear that participants do, indeed, make use of self-preservation communication strategies to avoid disclosing and/or to conceal their sexual identity, when they do not want to disclose, or when they are still deciding how or if they wish to disclose to a given colleague. These are the perceived self-preservation communication strategies that the participants said they used prior to disclosing that they are gay in their interactions with colleagues. Social interactions such as those that gay individuals have with their colleagues are pivotal from a symbolic interactionist perspective on the self and a person's minding. Minding directly aligns with Mead's views, because, as was established in Chapter 2, Mead (1934:xiii–xiv) posits that the self and a person's minding emerge from social interaction, where language is seen as the mechanism for minding/thinking. Participants use language as a communication tool when they implement self-preservation communication strategies and for the reality-altering event, disclosed through either spontaneous or strategic communication. If the sexual identity of the gay individual is disclosed by another person, e.g. a colleague telling another colleague the individual is gay, the afore-mentioned argument regarding minding and language still holds true.

The aspects of the re-communication conceptual framework presented in the preceding sections represent two of the dominant themes and the subsequent broad themes and sub-themes that emerged from the thematic textual analysis, which were found to have

overlapping patterns in the coding process, confirmed by the findings, and presented in this chapter.

In the section that follows, the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure are evident from the analysis/findings of the interviews and narratives and will be discussed as follows:

- *Physical location* – At times, the location/region in which gay individuals work, impacts on how and/or if they will disclose their sexual identity;
- *Organisational identity* – References to how gay individuals perceive the treatment, inclusion and support they receive within their organisational contexts;
- *Disclosure motivators* – Elements that gay individuals perceive as motivating them to disclose their sexual identity more freely to a colleague or colleagues, as well as the colleagues with whom gay individuals choose to share personal information in the organisational context and why;
- *Disclosure detractors* – Elements that gay individuals perceive as preventing them from disclosing their sexual identity more freely to colleagues, as well as the colleagues with whom gay individuals choose not to share personal information in the organisational context and why.

5.4 Elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure

Figure 5.1 presents the elements that may influence to whom, what, when, where, why and how gay individuals may be influenced to avoid disclosing their sexual identity, conceal their sexual identity, or to disclose it to colleagues in their organisational contexts.

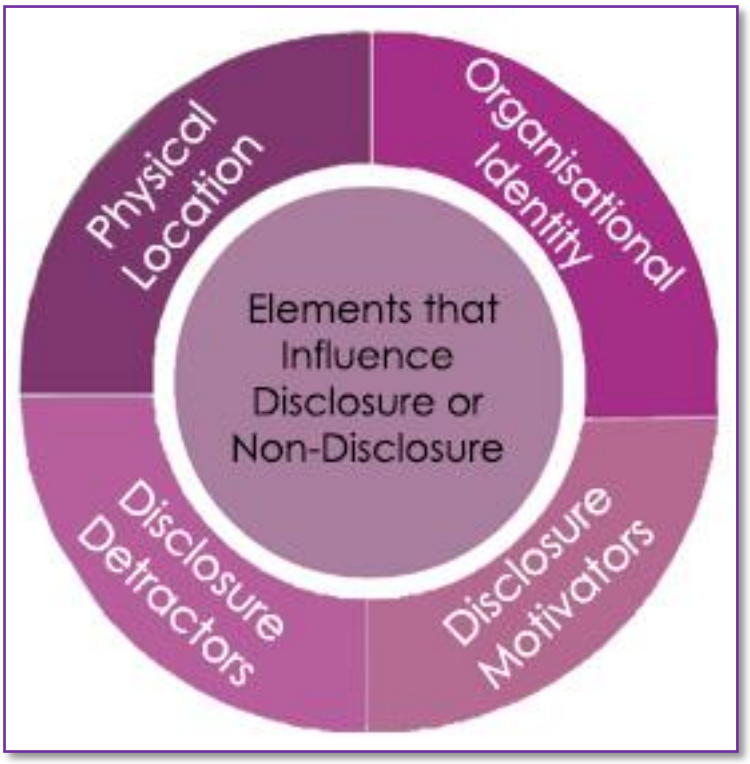


Figure 5.1: Elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure

It is important to note that some of the elements discussed in the following section were identified out of the data as possible elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure. There are also elements that overlap, thereby acting as a motivator to either encourage or discourage disclosure and these are indicated as such. It is further noted that there may be additional elements outside the ambit of this study that would also influence gay individuals, but were not raised by participants.

5.4.1 Physical location

Physical location is a context dependent element that influences disclosure. Some participants claim that the type of institution or the region or physical location in which they work could influence their choice of disclosing their sexual identity or continue avoiding disclosure, or concealing their sexual identity to colleagues. Although location was not one of the prominent themes, it remains impactful, because there is a perception that in urban areas – particularly in bigger cities – there is a higher tolerance of alternative sexual identity, thereby making disclosure easier. It is also perceived that in rural areas of South Africa and in other African countries, there seems to be more conservative and even discriminatory views regarding gay people and, therefore, the disclosure becomes more difficult. In some countries or cases, disclosure becomes highly risky, because

homosexuality is illegal and may even lead to criminal charges. One of the participants explains, *I was working in Botswana and you know there being gay and having gay relationships is illegal and frowned upon and you can have a lot of issues in that country for being gay*. These physical locations, understandably, discourage gay individuals from feeling free to disclose their sexual identity. As pointed out by the working group that was commissioned in 2015 by the Other Foundation and undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), discussed in Chapter 3, Africa has the highest number of countries that criminalise same-sex relationships (Sutherland *et al* 2016:23, 45).

Another participant illustrates the point about the complexity of disclosing being gay in urban areas versus more rural areas in South Africa, by saying, *… in Johannesburg / Pretoria / Cape Town I do not feel under duress when having to mention that I'm gay. I tend not to mention it at all in rural / smaller communities, as they tend not to be as open as people in the cities*. One of the reasons for gay individuals tending to be less open to disclose their sexual identity as gay in more remote or rural communities may be that people in rural communities do not get to spend much time in close proximity of openly gay individuals and, in some case, they may not even know any gay individuals. This position is considered and supported by the HSRC 2015 survey on attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa. As discussed in Chapter 3, "one of the most compelling explanations for differing views on homosexuality is that one of the best predictors of a person's attitude towards homosexuality is the amount of direct contact they have with gay and lesbian people. It has been shown in numerous studies that what most effectively shifts people's negative perceptions of homosexual people is increased contact, especially with family members and friends" (Sutherland *et al* 2016:41). If there were more exposure to gay individuals in these communities, there could have been an increase in acceptance of gay individuals. Given the possible stigma associated with being gay in rural communities, which are perceived as being more conservative, it is possible that the lack of exposure to gay individuals and the conservative outlook of many in remote regions could be contributing factors for disclosure in these communities being challenging for gay individuals. However, in attempting to extrapolate the reasoning that it is perceived more risky to reveal sexual identity as gay in rural areas it became apparent that there is little extant research into the views about disclosing sexual identity in Africa. This position is supported by the statement of Sutherland *et al* (2016:3) in Chapter 3, which explains that, while there is a general belief that African people are homophobic, there has been little extant research

into this topic in Africa and so much of this is perception-based. This is an interesting factor that should be explored in future research. It may provide additional depth into and understanding of this topic.

5.4.2 Organisational identity

It was found that, depending on how participants perceived the organisational contexts and climate and/or culture in which they function, they may be influenced to disclose or influenced to avoid disclosing their sexual identity. If, for example, the treatment of gay individuals is positive, gay individuals are perceived as being supported in the organisation, and the organisational policies are supportive of minority rights, the gay individuals may be encouraged to disclose their sexual identity. If the organisational climate and/or culture is considered unsupportive, or the gay individual has experienced anti-gay sentiments, s/he may be reluctant to disclose his/her sexual identity. The evidence extrapolated from the data analysis supported that, when participants felt protected and supported by organisational practices of staff and management and/or by a manager taking a firm stance against discrimination, it lead some participants to feel more confident to disclose their sexual identity. This affirms the discussions in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.3.1) by authors such as Bernstein and Swartwout (2012:1162), Dentato *et al* (2014:486, 492) Jex *et al* (2014:179–180), Köllen (2016:1972), Ragins and Cornwell (2001:1255), Tejeda (2006:47-48) and Wessel (2017:242–243), in that an organisation with a supportive organisational climate and/or culture may motivate disclosure.

It is, however, interesting to note that some participants did opt to disclose, even if they thought a colleague might discriminate against them for being gay, because the findings indicated that they felt that they would be protected from being marginalised professionally and, in some cases, even socially, based on their organisational context being a “safe” organisational environment. Moreover, some of the participants perceived that the fact that they have not had negative communication disclosure experiences in the organisation could possibly be attributed to an intolerance of discrimination in their organisation by senior members of the organisation and/or its employees. This indicates that these individuals likely work in organisational climates and/or cultures that are supportive and psychologically safe. As was established in the literature by authors such as Ashkanasy and Hartell (2014:138, 140) and Edmondson (2018) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.1) and supported by the findings that follow, for employees to perform optimally, they need to feel safe and secure in their organisation, which leads to feelings of acceptance and respect from employees. In support of this, one of the participants

described that … *my experiences regarding my sexual orientation in my workplace has not been negative. I think it could be due to our company's intolerance towards any form of discrimination … I am privileged to work for a company where my sexual orientation has never been used to make me feel victimised or uncomfortable*. The participant used words such as "privileged" when referring to working for an organisation where employees and/or management demonstrate intolerance towards bigotry. It can be inferred that this participant felt a sense of positivity towards the organisation because of the support the organisation and its members demonstrates for gay individuals. Another participant specifically expressed that, based on policies and committees in her organisational context, she feels protected as a gay individual. She expressed her perception as follows: *…I think the policies protect me like with the ethics and integrity committee.* Additionally, it is extrapolated that, when participants feel the management lives out the organisational policies, it influences their perception in a positive way. One of the participant's responses summarises the afore-mentioned point by saying that at his organisation. *…they [organisational policies] are lived out, in reality, the majority of the staff don't care, which I like*. Therefore, it can be deduced and is supported by the literature in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.3.1) by authors such as Bernstein and Swartwout (2012:1162), Dentato *et al* (2014:492), Köllen (2016:1972), Ragins and Cornwell (2001:1255), Tejeda (2006:47) and Wessel (2017:242–243) that organisations should be encouraged to take small steps and do small things to create an organisational climate and/or culture free of discrimination. This includes ensuring that managers enforce and live out policies prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination and encourage the inclusion of all partners.

It is positive to note that, although participants could generally recollect some negative experiences when disclosing their sexual identity to various colleagues, for most participants, these seemed to be isolated incidents and management dealt with it swiftly and sensitively within their respective organisations. One participant explained, when there was a negative experience … *it was taken very seriously by the company and the colleague was asked to apologise to me, which I appreciated*. One participant even took it a step further by explaining that gay partnerships were treated equally to heterosexual partnerships in their organisation. This is demonstrated by the benefits for which gay employees in same-sex partnerships were eligible and/or the forms that were completed for benefits, such as medical aid, pension funds and life insurance policies, which included diverse relationships. This participant noted *…it is the same for any person*

whether you gay, straight, multi-racial couples, doesn't matter. As long as you can prove that you in a relationship all the benefits are the same. Whether you married to the same-sex person or whether you married to a heterosexual, whatever relationship you are in, your pension, say after death, your pension beneficiaries – benefits are exactly the same. Medical aid is the same. Everything is the same. Like you as a gay individual can register your partner even though you're not married but you in a relationship you can register them onto your medical aid as a partner. This participant also indicated that these types of benefits and knowing the organisation was supportive of gay individuals made for a comfortable organisational climate and/or culture and encouraged open forms of communication. She said *…I think it makes a comfortable environment that you don't have to watch your back or be scared to say something to anyone. Must say the people are quite open. Obviously, you will have your certain individuals that will discriminate, like in any institution, any person will discriminate … I think in a way it does, [make you more] loyal and positive – because you know that they care even about not only you as the individual that is the actual worker, but also they see that your family is also receiving the same benefits as you and as any other 'normal' families – if you can classify it 'normal', families*. Another comment that illustrated the support of gay partnerships in policy is that *… even on an application form, every single one of our documents will say spouse or partner*. The way in which this participant expressed her positivity around such policies alluded to both a social and psychological comfort brought by these types of policies. This allows gay employees to feel accepted and positive towards their organisation, and to regard the organisational climate and/or culture as positive. This could influence interaction behaviour and make people more open and their communication more spontaneous. This deduction aligns with the work of Tejeda (2006:47) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.3.1), who observes that the social and psychological comfort brought by these types of policies may lead to gay employees feeling positive towards their organisations and accepted in the organisational climate and/or culture. After examining various studies, Tejeda (2006:48) extrapolates that organisations that are considered by employees as sustaining robust, non-discriminatory policies are often perceived as gay-friendly environments, and are likely to see more disclosure of sexual identity. This type of organisational context is likely to have loyal, productive employees, who are also more likely to experience job satisfaction, which, in turn, tends to lead to improved productivity.

Therefore, based on the findings and supported by the literature, it can be argued that organisations with robust non-discriminatory policies with manager and staff buy-in into these policies are more likely to be considered as "safe" organisations and organisations with supportive organisational cultures for gay individuals. Having these policies in place and having them supported by staff and management is also likely to give the perception of an organisational climate and/or culture that will not tolerate discrimination. When organisations have organisational climates and/or cultures that are inclusive, employees are more likely to feel positive towards work, which should improve mental wellbeing and lead to more inclusive organisational contexts. Gay individuals are also more likely to experience job satisfaction, which tends to lead to improved productivity. The afore-mentioned inferences of the researcher are corroborated by multiple participant quotations and, in terms of psychologically safe workspaces explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.1), they are mirrored by authors such as Ashkanasy and Hartell (2014:138, 140) and Edmondson (2018), coupled with the works of Bernstein and Swartwout (2012:1162), Dentato *et al* (2014:492), Köllen (2016:1972), Ragins and Cornwell (2001:1255), Tejeda (2006:47) and Wessel (2017:242–243) on manager and staff buy-in towards supportive organisational climates and culture, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.3.1).

Two dichotomous issues came to the fore and, although it was only expressed by one or two participants, it does make for an interesting argument. The first is that, in some cases, organisations have all the correct policies in place, but that some participants felt that this was simply because that was what was expected of organisations – not necessarily because of a supportive organisational climate and/or culture. One of the participants explained this by saying that he was expected to … *tone down my gayness*, when he was representing the organisation. The participant said that the organisation had all the right policies in place … *officially – definitely as they are trying to be the model organisation with diversity. They have policies anti-everything*. When he was further probed, he said that … *I do think it is expected that I will tone it down in an organisational context*. When the interviewer asked what was toned down, the participant responded … *my gayness, my openness, and look I can be a bit of a shock factor person so maybe that is why*.

As per the social penetration theory discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2) by Altman and Taylor (1973:3–7), Ayres (1979:192), Baak *et al* (2000:40) and Pan and Lieber

(2008:32–33), there are individuals who reveal intimate information far quicker than others do, and the social penetration theory refers to these individuals as *high/over-revealers* – a term explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2*)* by Baak *et al* (2000:41–42) as revealing too much too soon. The participant in the afore-mentioned example described himself as an over-revealer and this is likely what is being discouraged in the organisational context. However, this remains a form of discrimination, because it would be unlikely that a heterosexual individual would be required to "tone down" his/her heterosexuality. This could also be linked to professionalism, in that it was the perception of the organisation that, if the participant disclosed his personal information, he should do so more professionally. What is of concern is the way in which professionalism, although an outline of normative values that set boundaries and criteria for appropriate behaviour and conduct, was being associated with gayness in this case. In other words, the implication is that this individual was unprofessional, because he is gay. Professionalism should in no way be associated with gayness: being gay or disclosing being gay should never be associated with a lack of professionalism, as that is tantamount to discrimination.

It could be argued that the reference is actually about expecting that no employees should disclose too much personal information within their professional context. Professionalism sustains and promotes respectful and cooperative organisations. Therefore, it can be argued that, by equating an individual's "gayness" with his/her professionalism is not fostering cooperative organisational contexts. These postulations of the researcher are also supported by the work of Mizzi (2013:1602, 1604) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.4), where it was noted that professionalism is based on heteronormative values and is often open to interpretation. Hence, there will be guidelines as to what constitutes professionalism. However, as established by Fredriksson and Johansson (2014:587) and Nygren and Stigbrand (2014) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.4), individuals form their professional identities based on their own assumptions and beliefs. Therefore, it can be deduced that, although there may be guidelines on what is considered appropriate language, behaviour or actions, individuals and social groups in a professional context still bring their own attitudes and beliefs and these are, for the most part, dominated by heteronormative values.

Some organisations do not have any policies in place, but by the sheer virtue of the positivity of colleagues, participants raising this did not feel fearful or compromised by

the lack of policies around gay rights or equality of gay employees. One of the participants noted … *no, they do not have any policies, so technically you are not protected but you still feel you are because of the fact you have never had a bad experience*. It can be argued that not having policies in place that protect the rights of gay individuals could be problematic, because it poses risks for gay individuals. The researcher posits that the problem is that not having policies is too dependent on individual relationships and the type of people employed at a given time. From an organisational standpoint, this may be positive for interpersonal relationships, but it is risky, as not having formal policies only protects employees from discrimination by the virtue of whom the gay individuals currently work for – not because the individual is protected from discrimination in his/her organisational context. Not having non-discriminatory policies in place should be discouraged as an organisational practice.

Another issue connected to professionalism is the interaction behaviour between gay individuals and clients. Some participants communicated that, when it came to disclosure in the organisation, disclosing to clients created a particular concern to some participants because of a perceived increased risk that, if the customer does not respond positively towards the disclosure, it may actually affect the bottom line of the business. A number of the participants identified disclosure to customers as being a high-risk disclosure in the reward/cost assessment. As explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2.3) by Baak *et al* (2000:41) and Pan and Lieber (2008:33), individuals assess costs and rewards to determine if further penetration (from the individual enquiring) and revelation (from the individual revealing) will be of value. – In this case, if the customer does not accept the participant's identity as gay, it would directly affect the gay individual's reputation.

It could cause an uncomfortable work relationship between the gay individual and the customer. In extreme circumstances, it could even lead to the gay individual losing that client and, therefore, income for both him/herself and the organisation. It should be noted that, whilst it could be said that this would be the customer's own personal bigotry and should not reflect on the gay individual, this is a perception-based study and the interpretation of participants are pivotal. One of the participants summarised this when she was asked if she felt it would be more of a risk to tell someone in her professional or personal life … *I would say professional, because when it comes to customers and things like that you-you need to be careful*. The researcher then probed and asked, *What do you think the risks are in telling a customer?* The participant responded, *Well, I think [you*

know] not with colleagues necessarily but for me with the customers and things like that. If they have – if they take it wrong they can really hurt your business.

What is positive to note in both the previous responses and the other comments that are not included is that for the majority of the participants in this study, disclosure seems to be a positive experience that leads to spontaneous communication. With the exception of one or two isolated incidences throughout their careers, very few participants expressed experiencing negativity. Some comments supporting this intimation from participants are *… I am fortunate enough that I have never encountered a negative reaction from a work colleague* and *… I do not recall negative experiences during the last 18 years. Not with colleagues*.

A number of the participants confirmed that the social aspect at work was an important element, which implies that social interaction is important to employees. This is positive for the organisational climate and/or culture, because participants said that social interaction and strong interpersonal relationships in the organisational context were an important aspect of job satisfaction and happiness within an organisation. This aligns with Chapter 3 (Section 3.4.1), where it was emphasised that interpersonal relationships in the organisational context have multiple benefits for the employee as an individual and in terms of having a positive influence on the organisational climate and/or culture and interaction behaviour between colleagues.

Some participants expressed that they found it easier to tell colleagues that they were gay than individuals in their private lives. The reasons provided for preferring to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues are that the colleagues were less invested in the gay person's personal life and, therefore, they were unlikely to interact with and disclose the participant's sexual identity to anyone outside of work. This implies that some participants deemed it a lower risk to disclose their sexual identity to a colleague than to an individual in their personal life. This risk factor could be based on a greater risk and/or fear that disclosing to someone in a gay individual's personal life could be considered greater than losing a relationship with colleagues. This is indicated by the following participant's quote *… I often find it easier to tell people things at work because how will it ever get out to people I know*? Another participant expressed positive feelings, because she could be open about her sexual identity in her current organisation, as opposed to the organisation for which she previously worked. She indicated how this actually helped

her to feel less stigmatised about being gay, as opposed to environments where individuals can be marginalised and prejudiced for having a certain sexual preference. The following participant had been stigmatised and mocked for being gay in her previous employment, but she had moved into a more positive organisational climate and/or culture, where she no longer felt this way. She expressed this by saying *… I do feel more positive because of a kind of moving away from that whole stigma*.

It can be positioned that, if individuals receive positive reinforcement after revealing aspects of themselves, they may be more open to revealing more significant information about themselves over time. If the experience is a positive one, they are likely to experience the disclosure of their sexual identity in a positive way, and, based on this experience, be more willing to disclose their sexual identity to other colleagues. Secondly, if the gay individual has had positive interactions with a colleague subsequent to the disclosure and the gay individual and his/her colleague continue to have a constructive relationship, it may act as a form of positive reinforcement. This may make the gay individual feel less vulnerable and, therefore, more comfortable to disclose other significant personal information to colleagues. This shows a link with the social penetration theory between disclosure and reinforcement dynamics, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2) by Baak *et al* (2000:39–40), in that, if individuals receive positive reinforcement from revealing aspects of themselves, they may be more open to reveal significant information about themselves over time.

The afore-mentioned argument evidences the importance and influence of the way in which the perceptions of gay employees of the way in which their organisational leadership, policies and organisational climates and/or cultures influence their disclosure experience. The more positive the disclosure experience, the more likely gay employees are to feel positive, have a healthy mental wellbeing at work, and be more invested in the organisation. These feelings may even have a positive influence on productivity.

5.4.3 Disclosure motivators

This section analyses the elements that may motivate a gay individual to disclose sexual identity. The disclosure motivators to be discussed include:

- Meaningful relationships at work;
- Guilt or dissonance;
- Trust in colleagues; and

- Attitude and behaviour.

5.4.3.1 Meaningful relationships at work

When a friendship and/or close bond exists between participants and a specific colleague this is considered a meaningful relationship at work and could influence disclosure. Friends are also those people with whom individuals are likely to share more intimate and personal information. This aligns with Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2), where it was demonstrated that friendships are important parts of forming close bonds. People are most likely to disclose sensitive information with those with whom they share friendships (Altman & Taylor 1973:3–4). Some participants alluded to the notion that, if they considered someone a friend, then they would generally have a more open relationship with them, tended to trust them and feel a sense of loyalty to them and, therefore, they were more likely to disclose their sexual identity to them. Some participants explained that they did not share personal information in a professional context, because they did not feel that being gay is work-related, or that it was professional to disclose, or they did not generally like sharing personal information in a work context. However, they did elucidate that, when someone was considered a friend, they were more inclined to disclose to them for various reasons. These reasons include, but are not limited to, they trusted a friend/s more; felt closer to and more open towards them; and felt that a friend would be more understanding and less prejudiced, given that they know them as a person.

Concurrently, some participants also implied that the risk of disclosure to someone whom they considered a friend was also high, as they did not want to put their work friendships into jeopardy. This would not only be the loss of a friend, but could also cause strained work relationships. This also aligns with the discussions on reward/cost assessments in the social penetration theory covered in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2.3), as observed by Baak *et al* (2000:41) and Pan and Lieber (2008:33). In this case, the gay individuals were weighing up the cost versus the reward or risk when contemplating disclosing their sexual identity to someone whom they considered a friend. By their own unique calculation, they would estimate the cost versus the reward or the risk versus the benefit of telling a colleague that they are gay. With those participants considered as friends, the risk did tend to increase as the stakes for risk were increased, but, for the most part, it was still a motivator for disclosure. One participant noted … *Sometimes, if I have a friend at work, then I will share with them, because you see them every day but work is work to me*. The statement is oxymoronic, because on the one side, the gay individual

conveyed that s/he would disclose to a friend at work. On the other side s/he explicated that work should be focused on work and was not the place for personal relationships. By doing this, the participant was potentially depersonalising work relationships/friendships and possibly even minimising work friendships as nothing more than a professional relationship. Communicating oxymoronically this way, could be a protection mechanism that gay individuals use to downplay either their anxiety or disappointment if their disclosure were to impact on their work friendships. Other participants did not see their work friendships as simply work, but rather as sharing a deep and meaningful bond with a work friend, similar to any other friend. Work friendships have multiple benefits for mental wellbeing and feelings of acceptance in the organisation.

There were various examples that focused on friendship but the following three specific examples placed a strong emphasis on how these work friendships were important to gay individuals in the organisational context. One of the gay individuals expressed the depth of what friendships in the organisational context means by using emotive adjectives about friendship such as "everything" or "nothing" by asserting that … *if they [are] my friend then I would tell them what goes on in my life, it would be everything or nothing*. Another participant stated that she would only be open and honest with someone she shares a close friendship with … *I'd only have a proper conversation telling someone if well, – people I'm really, really close with and we're so-called friends at work*. This validates that, when a friendship exists between gay individuals and colleagues, it is likely to encourage disclosure. On the other hand, it is also considered high risk or anxiety provoking, because, if they lose a friendship at work, it would be a personal loss. Moreover, this could also affect their organisational context and/or interpersonal communication with this colleague and possibly also with other colleagues.

There are relationships that may not be classified as friendship, but still are deep and meaningful relationships. These type of relationships yielded similar emotions and the urge for disclosure as friendship. It could be purported from the inferences made in some interviews and narratives that individuals felt a sense of loyalty and obligation to share with those with whom they share friendships or close bonds. One of the participants explained these type of meaningful relationships and/or bonds by saying that … *I think you just share a bond with somebody - and that you more comfortable with that person. It helps that they liberal people. It doesn't bother them – but, ja [Afrikaans word for "yes"]*

– it's not just every liberal person that walks in that I'm open with. It takes a relationship and a friendship that forms over time. There are multiple themes covered in this quote. Two of the elements that influence disclosure to which this participant alluded, was when she shared a bond of some sorts with the colleague or she had a more open relationship with a colleague. The views or beliefs of the colleagues were highlighted in this quote in terms of the participant's perception that someone with liberal views eased the anxiety of the gay individual to disclose. The reference to how much easier it was for a gay individual to disclose to someone that she/he perceived as having liberal views is discussed multiple times in both the self-preservation communication strategies and the reality-altering event.

The meaningful relationships to which other participants referred are those colleagues with whom the participants had a more established relationship, or someone the participants trust or to whom they felt close. In these cases, the participants seemed more motivated to disclose their sexual identity to the said colleagues. One of the gay individual's expressed this by explaining that the people to whom she would disclose are … *generally people that I got a bit closer with and that we built a relationship and sort of started chatting about other things and then we'd talk*. Some of the participants explained that when they became closer to someone, they wanted to share more personal information with them and be more open with them. This finding seems to imply that this sharing of information aids in more meaningful work relationships. One of the participants explicated this by saying *… if you becoming closer with someone, you know, you [want to] talk about what you did on the weekend or you know…I went on a date or… whatever the case is, and then, I mean, it becomes very awkward not to tell*. This participant was referring to the fact that, if she was trying to share meaningful information without having disclosed her sexual identity it made the situation awkward, because she knew that she had not shared a pivotal piece of information with the colleague. These findings are also directly linked to the social penetration theory, as discussed by Altman and Taylor (1973:5–6) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2), in that the interpersonal aspects of a developing relationship will progress in stages, from more superficial interactions to more intimate interactions. – The more an individual trusts another, the more layers will peel away, thereby demonstrating that an individual is reluctant to disclose sensitive information to another person, until that person has earned the individual's trust.

From the afore-mentioned discussions, it can be purported that individuals do seek some sort of interpersonal relationship with others to form either a friendship or a closer bond. However, the fear of disclosure to a friend or someone with whom the gay individual feels a bond is often focused on the potential social isolation it may cause at work and the risk of being excluded from social activities, which is discussed later in the chapter.

Another element raised was the sharing of personal information at work. Two of the participants explicated that they did not usually share personal information at work, and that they would not tell one person everything. Therefore, they engaged in limited disclosure about themselves. Although this is a relatively natural feeling for most individuals, it seems that, because these individuals are gay, they felt that they had to justify feeling this way, whereas in the participants' perception, a heterosexual person would not necessarily feel that s/he has to justify this. For example, one of the participants said, *I am actually quite not a personal information sharer so I generally don't, but I suppose maybe a handful of people, but even then it is different for each individual. If I feel that they can handle that information I give them, then I will give it to them, but only if I want insight or like advice or something, like then I say it to them, but it fits the person.* A second participant explained that she would not tell every one of her colleagues the same thing and/or explain whatever she disclosed in the same way. She said, *I can't just tell. Like if you had to give me a group of five people and they were all different I would choose who to tell what but I could not tell them all everything*. Moreover, beside the afore-mentioned point, this example also evidences one of the assumptions of this study to be valid – that at times gay individuals use different communication disclosure either strategies or spontaneity to reveal their sexual identity to different colleagues, depending on the gay individuals' perceptions of a colleague.

5.4.3.2 Guilt or dissonance

In the context of this study, the elements of guilt or dissonance are connected to friendship and the formation of close or meaningful relationships with colleagues, for the most part. This element, which influences disclosure or non-disclosure, includes participants expressing a sense of guilt and/or dissonance for not disclosing their sexual identity to a particular colleague. Participants not disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague with whom they have a close relationship could result in feelings of guilt about the omission. In some cases, these are lies of omission. Lies of omission (leaving out an important piece of information, hiding the truth and/or failing to correct a misapprehension) about his/her sexual identity. For example, one of the participants

explained how he used pronouns and neutral words to explain what he did on the weekends to colleagues, excluding that he went to a gay bar, thereby using a lie of omission by leaving out this important information. *We went to this awesome pub on the weekend a whole bunch of us mates. It was such a jol [A South African slang word for party or good time].* When asked the name of the pub he responded, *I was so wasted [implying drunk] I don't even remember the name*. In other words, the participant avoided the risk of the colleague finding out that it was a gay bar. Participants gave two other examples that demonstrated lies of commission. Firstly, one of the female participants explained that she often had to work in the evenings and, therefore, she was often asked what her husband thought when she worked late at night. She explained, *I don't wanna go into a discussion with them so I just say, no it's fine with them*. Another example occurred when a participant said she was single. This could arguably lead to greater anxiety or even discourage disclosure, because the gay individual not only avoided disclosing her sexual identity; she also had to account for the fact that she lied to this colleague. *I had told him I was single for so long and he felt sad and bad for me so I was like I must tell him*, and then she also indicated that she felt guilty about lying to him. The guilt of non-disclosure through a lie of commission or omission illustrates a complexity in which the gay individual finds herself entrapped. Being in this situation could add stress because of feelings of deceitfulness and may even discourage disclosure because of the fear that others will think less of him/her for withholding the truth.

These feelings of guilt could lead to heightened levels of anxiety and/or even impact on productivity, as anxiety can decrease productivity in the organisational context. On a personal level, the gay individual could have feelings of guilt and/or dissonance because of feeling close to a colleague, but not sharing this important piece of information with him/her. An example of a response from one of the participants explains this, in that she stated that *… in instances when it was hard, I think for me it's always the honesty factor and people that need to know who I am… because you work so closely together*. As established in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2), there is a positive correlation between positive work outputs and cooperative engagements, including friendships with positive communication.

5.4.3.3 Trust in colleagues

Trusting colleagues enough to tell them personal information is an element that could influence an individual to disclose personal information. Trust as an element influencing disclosure was emphasised by a number of participants. One of the participants affirmed

this by saying *… I told them, because I trust them*. As explicated in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.2), trust is an element often associated with both the formation and dissolution of interpersonal relationships and, therefore, it is not surprising that participants raised it. Individuals are likely to confide in those whom they trust and they will likely trust those with whom they share meaningful relationships in their organisational context.

During the interviews, it became apparent that intrapersonal factors, such as the gay individual's own prejudice towards certain types of people, could cause distrust and, therefore, a reluctance to disclose. For example, if someone is perceived to come from a conservative background, the gay person may stereotype him/her as being judgmental towards gay people, even though the person may not have done or said anything to give the gay person reason to believe this about him/her. In this case, the gay individual actually took on the role of the judgemental participant. The following example supports this argument: *… There is a woman I smoke with [Sarie] she is an older lady, Afrikaans [a South African culture], and I have not told her and she constantly speaks about her husband and asks me what I am doing this weekend and I don't even mention [Samantha]… I just get this vibe, she has never said anything, and I am judging her and she hasn't even said anything like she is a homophobe*. Based on the colleague's heritage/culture and age, the gay individual considered her anti-gay individuals, although there was no evidence to support this belief. This also indicates that, based on their socially constructed realities, gay individuals, at times, have perceived ideas about how a particular cultural and/or religious group may judge him/her. In this case, the gay individual makes unfounded judgements, which may be based on his/her past experiences and socially constructed views of people's perceptions and treatment of gay individuals.

5.4.3.4 Attitude and behaviour

Another element extrapolated as an element that could influence disclosure is the attitude and behaviour of colleagues to the participants. Some participants explained that what motivates them to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues is often congruent with the attitude that they perceive their colleagues to have towards them and/or others.

In other cases, it is their behaviour. In other words, this occurs when a colleague's attitude and/or behaviour is a motivating element for disclosure. This element and the examples extrapolated from the findings are associated with the social act related to symbolic interactionism, which was posited in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3.1) by Mead

(1934:6–7), in that individuals have a specific attitude towards a given social act, based on the individual's varied experiences in his/her interactions. The attitude of the gay individual towards the social act of interacting with particular colleagues would be based on experiences with these colleagues. The gay individual's attitude towards the social act of disclosing his/her sexual identity could be based on experiences s/he has had with disclosing being gay to other colleagues previously. All of these experiences would contribute to the attitude an individual has towards the particular social act. The same could be said of the colleagues with whom the gay individual interacts.

Three examples that resonate with this conjecture are: one participant said that it … *will basically be their attitude towards other people- but being in the environment that we in, they not really judging because we work with all walks of life*. This quote is not only about attitude, but also that the participant perceived that her type of work environment, which was explained as diverse and filled with people from … *all walks of life* also impacted on the ease of disclosure, because this gay individual did not feel people would judge and that it was safer to disclose. Another participant equated his disclosure, based on the attitude of a colleague and the consideration of the need to disclose to establish a good relationship with a colleague. This participant said that what motivates him is … *just the attitude, I think if you [want to] have a good relationship at work sometimes you don't have to throw it in their face and you can just keep quiet about it*. It is interesting to note that this participant added that, as a gay individual he should not "throw" being gay in his colleague's "face", thereby, implying that there could be something upsetting about someone being gay.

The last quotation does not specifically state the word *attitude* in relation to an element that motivates disclosure, but does allude to it by focusing on the way a colleague makes this participant feel by stating that *… maybe it relies on people making you feel welcome to open up*. Moreover, the notion of someone making gay individuals feel as if they can be open about their sexuality or that they can disclose it was explained further by another of the participant, who also referred to those with whom she felt open as an element that influences disclosure. In this case, it not only motivated disclosure, but also fostered better relationships between gay individuals and the colleagues to whom they disclose. She said*… It's usually people … that have opened up to me usually first … so that they can trust me – that also built a relationship and it gives you a bit more freedom to talk about yourself*.

It is interesting to note that none of the participants explained a situation in which they disclosed to a colleague, not knowing that s/he was also in fact gay.

Now that the elements motivating an individual to disclose his/her sexual identity as gay has been explained, the next section engages with those elements that detracted or discouraged participants to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues in the organisational context.

5.4.4 Disclosure detractors

This section describes the elements that may influence a gay individual not to disclose his/her sexual identity. The disclosure detractors to be discussed include:

- Attitudes and behaviour;
- Fear of rejection; and
- Conservative ideologies.

5.4.4.1 Attitude and behaviour

Attitude and behaviour have been clarified by some participants in the previous discussion as an element that influences disclosure. However, attitude and behaviour are also identified as elements influencing non-disclosure: negative attitudes and/or behaviour discourage disclosure. An example of negative attitudes and behaviour is a colleague making derogatory comments about gay individuals. Therefore, one of the elements that discourage a gay individual's disclosure is a colleague who speaks in a derogatory way about gay people or display bigoted behaviour. This leads to the gay individual feeling discouraged from disclosing his/her sexual identity to this colleague of in his/her presence. This would potentially result in the gay individual being discouraged from disclosing his/her sexual identity. For example, one of the participants clarified that *… the thing is that if you hear people speaking like especially around being gay and using like faggot and stuff like that…obviously then you, not going to be like I am gay so now what because you do not want to have that negativity on you*.

Another gay individual relayed a story that relates to the use of derogatory language, although he made the decision to use this situation as an opportunity to disclose that he is gay, because he felt that he could not continue to travel with these work colleagues, if his sexual identity was not disclosed. *When I was in Botswana, we came to South Africa*

from Botswana and I came with people from Botswana and the trainer and her husband. They are connected to [X University] and he, the husband, was making a point of the work they had had to do with looking after abused kids and he was saying how they have this boy who went through such horrible stuff and terrible situations and said such terrible stuff about homosexuality. When he said that, I got angry. He said gays are all into prostitution and many gays' abuse children. Because of the context, I had to say we are in South Africa and that is not okay to say here and I am gay and you have offended me. Although disclosure did take place in this instance, it was, in fact, the negative attitudes and behaviour of these colleagues that prompted the individual to disclose.

5.4.4.2 Fear of rejection

Fear of rejection is a broad theme with multiple sub-themes, but at the core of each of the sub-themes is an innate fear that disclosure may lead to rejection, based on various elements such as colleagues' prejudice, worldviews, *etc.* Some of the participants also expressed that they worried that, once they had disclosed their sexual identity as gay, colleagues would think differently about them and/or even reject them. In some cases, some of the participants raised the point that, after disclosure, it often seemed as if the colleagues felt that they needed to convince the gay individual that they were not gay themselves. For example, one participant when asked by the researcher if she was worried she would be judged for being gay, one participant said, *… not judging, but think differently, and my most worry is when I tell women. I have told people before where they say like 'I am not gay' and I am like, I am not asking you*.

It is interesting to note that many gay individuals – both men and women – experience prejudiced behaviour by people to whom they have disclosed, who seem to think, because someone is gay, they will be interested in them. Therefore, they feel the need to make it clear that they are *not* gay, in case the gay individual may show an interest in them. Another of the participants expressed similar concerns by stating that *… I suppose its people treating you differently because you gay. Like I don't want to be treated differently because of my sexual preferences*. This "differently" to which the participant referred possibly has a two-fold meaning. Firstly, it involves people acting differently towards the individual simply because s/he is gay; and secondly people start behaving differently when they find out someone is gay, because they do not want to create the impression that they are available or give the gay person the wrong idea. These are all prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes being promulgated. Another participant supported the point by stating, *… I think as straight people looking at us as straight people they*

don't see anything, but if they knew that I was gay they may think ah [Susan] is totally after [Kira] and for that reason sometimes I also don't like to always tell because I am not some predator set upon straight women.

Another significant aspect that some participants mentioned as discouraging them from disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague was whether the participant believes the colleague held certain prejudices against gay people that may lead to rejection. One of the prejudices mentioned and alluded to in multiple engagements is bigotry. What is interesting about the discussions around bigotry is that some of the participants indicated that bigotry in general, including racism and sexism and not just prejudice towards sexual orientation, served as a factor that discouraged disclosure. This is because, if someone is, for example, a racist or a bigot and not only to one particular thing, some of the participants explained that they then believed this person to have other prejudices. Therefore, the participants indicated that they avoided disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues whom they perceive as being prejudiced in general, because they fear being judged and rejected. For example, one participant said, *You can immediately see if they have attitude - if they [are] racist or sexist or – obviously those colleagues I will not share anything with – [because] you will be judged*. Another participant stated that she would avoid telling someone *[because] they racist and sexist. I won't tell them, because then they judge people*.

A significant element that influenced disclosure for multiple participants was when perceiving a colleague's belief system as a possible reason to treat the participant differently or even negatively post-disclosure. This perceived prejudice also evoked fear in the participants disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague whom they perceived as being prejudiced. Moreover, when participants perceived a risk to their relationship with a colleague post-disclosure, they may be detracted from disclosing their sexual identity to them. For example, one participant said *… the idea of coming out at work (like anywhere else) has always been a worrying one*.

Fear of rejection involves another element, which is fear of victimisation or being ridiculed or mocked, which is also a form of rejection. Some of the examples were more anecdotal based on experiences, e.g. one gay individual said, *I think the risk is that you could be victimised a bit … I think that's the biggest risk*. Another participant added that *… I had a fear of being teased and tormented by people. My brothers, who were in the army,*

would beat and torment the 'moffies' and I didn't want that happening to me. Interestingly, in this case, the gay individual was actually using a bigoted term in relaying the story by explaining how her brothers would beat "the moffies," a slang word used to refer to gay men. Even being a woman, she was fearful, based on second-hand shared by her brothers. The consequence of being ridiculed as a "moffie" could lead to the gay individual feeling victimised and developing an innate fear, not only of her brothers rejecting and/or bullying her, but that the same would happen with anyone to whom she disclosed her sexual identity in the organisational context.

These participants' experiences indicate that the risk of disclosure seems to align with a fear of social rejection, rather than job loss, being passed up for promotions or severe victimisation, as was the case in previous years. The evidence in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3) implies that exhaustive research – such as that of Ragins and Cornwell (2001), Valentine (1993), Croteau (1996) and Day and Schoenrade (1997) – observes more discrimination, victimisation and difficulty disclosing sexual identity in the organisational context in studies conducted prior to the year 2000. These studies are compared to studies conducted from the early 2000s onwards, which seem to indicate less discrimination and victimisation and more fear of social rejection. While the evidence does seem to purport that organisations seem to have become more accepting of gay individuals, it is still difficult and challenging for gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity, because they continue to be concerned about social issues such as rejection and changed behaviour towards them, once colleagues discover that they are gay. For example, one participant said, *We used to have lunch together so often and then after I told her I was gay she avoided having lunch or personal conversations with me even though she remained professional, it hurt*.

Another participant alluded to her fear of disclosure, but interestingly, this was not anecdotal or based on experiences. Instead, it related to other gay individuals' negative experiences, which the participant was projecting: *… You know, growing up and hearing from older gay people how bad it was, and how it makes you kind of fearful that oh I am going to be worked out. I mean those people were being worked out their companies and sometimes outright fired*. Interesting to note is that these fears stem from this gay individual's perception of those from a different era – i.e. fear of actual job loss or "being worked out of their companies" – which are seldom part of the current organisational

context or the current realities of most gay individuals; yet, it still instils fear in some participants.

The fear of colleagues losing respect for the gay individual after disclosure of their sexual identity also came to the fore in the data analysis. One of the participants explained this by saying *… You know, they might not respect you or they might make jokes behind [your back] … they might make jokes about it and that sort of thing*. This fear can also be linked to the *Me,* as it relates to the conjectures of authors such as Cronk (2005), Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:62) and Mead (1934:173–175) on the *I* and *Me* as it relates to symbolic interactionism in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3.4), where the *Me* is explained as the socialised other. If applied to this study, it can be purported that the *Me* is the aspect of the self that is shaped through socialisation and determined by social interaction, because it involves the way which an individual sees him/herself through the eyes of other people, based on the way other people interact with him/her. It is sometimes referred to as the "looking-glass self", which refers to the way people want others to perceive them and, in this case, the way in which the participants perceived their colleagues to have reacted to their disclosure of their sexual identity.

5.4.4.3 Conservative ideologies

The factor that was most prominent among participants was the fear or the lack of willingness to disclose to colleagues whom the participants' perceived as having conservative ideologies, particularly religious views, religious positioning and strong cultural or tribal roots. The participants perceived their colleagues with conservative religious views as highly judgemental. Although it is noted that non-religious people may also be judgemental, participants' perceptions were that they knew that there was complexity for religious or deeply culturally orientated people to accept them, because homosexuality is against their beliefs and traditions. This perception is supported by some of the studies in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3), where it was explained by Bernstein and Swartwout (2012:1149) that the concept of religiousness has been found to influence the perceived reaction of an individual to the disclosure of sexual identity, with those who are religious being considered more negative towards gay individuals and/or that accepting a gay individual may go against their moral beliefs.

Participants might be discouraged from disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues whom they perceive as having conservative views. This perception of religious or more traditional individuals from a cultural and tribalistic perspective being prejudiced towards

gay individuals could be linked to Mead's (1934:135–143) position on the generalised other, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3.4). As established in Chapter 2, in Mead's view (1934:135–143), the individual learns and internalises societal norms and roles through the process of socialisation (in this example, perceptions of the gay individual on religion and/or culture) and, in this process, the *Me* or socialised other is formed. It seemed to be the perception of the participants that people with religious and/or cultural norms are prejudiced against gay people. In this way, the *Me* is formed through the process of socialisation and tends to serve as a guide that governs an individual's behaviour, so that s/he acts in socially desirable ways or according to what is considered "the norm". In this case, being gay may be perceived by some to whom the gay individual discloses as going against the social norm. It is possible that it is this desire to act in a socially desirable way what discouraged some participants from disclosing their sexual identity to religious people.

The quotations given below from multiple participants indicate the fear or discouragement of some participants to disclose to a religious colleague. This could stem from the postulations in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3), in that many South Africans identify themselves as being religious and holding conservative moral views on issues of sexual orientation. This standpoint is supported by the 2015 survey undertaken by the HSRC on the attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa, discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3). The survey pointed out that South Africa can be considered a religious society and based on this a "…large segment, if not the majority, of the South African population hold conservative moral beliefs about individual sexual activity and gender roles, which corresponds with their religious affiliation" (Sutherland *et al* 2016:23).

Although all the quotations deal with hesitation and/or discouragement at disclosing to religious individuals, they have slight nuances, which are explored next. One of the participants pointed out that she had always been hesitant to tell religious people, but from the explanation, it seemed as if some religions would be more of a detractor for this participant to disclose than others would *… I must add that I've always been more hesitant about being open towards more overtly religious colleagues. This applies to all religions, but with some religions, I would be a bit more hesitant than others, although ultimately it would still happen*.

Another participant clarified that her unwillingness to disclose came in her self-preservation communication stage, when she was still avoiding disclosure or concealing it, where colleagues could not understand her lack of belief in God. This led the participant to fear that the lack of understanding of her agnostic views would be perpetuated into a lack of understanding of how someone could be gay. *I refrained from disclosing this personal information for fear of the possible reactions from my colleagues. I had had some conversations with colleagues about faith, and God, and the fact that I do not believe in any God. The colleague I spoke with could not understand how this was possible*. This assertion also refers to the participant actually basing her experiences on the fact that she had been judged for being agnostic and the fact that she believed that, if a colleague could not even come to terms with this, they either would judge her for being gay, or view her agnostic views as the reason for her being gay.

This aligns with the theme of participants who have also experienced prejudice from religious people, which is now influencing their non-disclosure or disclosure to people whom they perceive as religious. This participant's quotation explores how religion may be a factor in gay individuals' opting to avoid disclosing to religious people and, in this case, the decision of being detracted from disclosing results from previous negative experiences of disclosing to religious individuals. When asked what could be a deterring factor to disclose, the participant said, *definitely religion*. She continued, *I would avoid it because I have already had negative experiences in a religious environment*.

The narrative of the next participant annotates a highly negative experience in which language and meaning are central. As explained in Chapter 2 (Sections 2.1 and 2.2.1), meaning is ascertained through language. In terms of disclosure for this individual, it is clear that the construction of social reality is based on the meaning ascribed to the situation of him disclosing to a religious colleague *... I have had another lady that thinks it [being gay] is totally wrong from a religious point of view and she said she knows we - as in gay people - will burn in hell. Even though the message is horrific, I was already an atheist. I didn't actually care and feel she is the kind of person suffering from a delusion and yet it is fine for people to have an affair. She didn't judge those people. With her, I tried to soft peddle it but I am gay, it is what I am. I tend to play it by ear and try and not offend anyone but, if I, if you attack me, I will try and shock you*. The participant used a protection mechanism to brush off this highly derogatory comment by saying that he did not believe the woman, because he was already agnostic. However, it should be noted

that, as per the definition of symbolic interactionism in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.1), language and meaning and the way in which individuals use language to exchange meaning, construct and co-construct social reality. The language used in this example has a perceived meaning to the gay individual by the colleague – the meaning the gay individual ascribed to this encounter is that this colleague believes *gay people burn in hell*.

There was also an example of a religious person not displaying negativity to the participant about being gay because of his/her religious views, but rather because this colleague was making jokes about gay individuals. The participant felt it important to note that this colleague was religious and, therefore, held to a higher standard in terms of not being discriminatory, and should be practicing positive attributes such as kindness, forgiveness, *etc.* Therefore, the participant was pointing out the hypocrisy of what this individual is saying, given that, in this gay individual's view, a religious person is expected to be more caring, loving and supportive, given that is the base of religious doctrine. *This was with a very religious colleague. We are standing smoking and one of the very religious guys made a homophobic joke and I said: 'excuse me, I am gay, and this is not on'. He did not believe me and he apologised and it was obvious he disapproved and he believes I am going to go to hell, but professionally, he could not do anything about it, and so has had to tolerate me even though I know he does not agree*. This gay individual also made assumptions of his own about the colleague by assuming that the colleague believes he is going to hell. The participant also pointed out that the colleague did not have a choice but to tolerate him, because the incident occurred in the organisation. This is poignant, as what adds a level of complexity to organisational communication and interaction behaviour is that individuals do not get to choose with whom they want to communicate or with whom they do or do not want to work, the way they can in their personal interaction behaviour. Therefore, it can be inferred that this may be the reason for some colleagues socially isolating gay individuals. – It is the only place where they have control over their communication with a colleague, because, in a professional context, they have to continue interacting. It should also be noted that this homophobic joke also led the gay individual to disclose his sexual identity. The use of inappropriate humour is discussed extensively in Chapter 6.

The following example addresses the issue of fear related to gay people needing to stay away from children. The negative connotations around gay individuals' contact with

children resurfaces in this element, as it did under attitudes and behaviour. In the analysis of this example, the participant's fear linked to her losing her business is highlighted, based on someone judging her on religious grounds and stating that being gay is immoral. The participant's fear was elevated, because she worked with children. *I run my own business now and do not blurt out the fact that I am gay, as I work with many religious schools. Although, if you can't see it from my 'sporty lesbian' attitude, attire and swag, you have been living under a rock in the dark ages. The last thing I need is a principal who finds it 'immoral' and gets rid of me on 'religious grounds'*. This issue seems to imply that gay people should not be around children, as if the so-called immorality would affect the children. Moreover, this participant was also using stereotyping about herself to express her position, thereby illustrating that an individual's own narrative is co-constructed by means of socially constructed views and the meaning ascribed to things an individual notes in her world. This aligns with Blumer's (1986:4) propositions in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.4) that "things" have two types of meaning: an intrinsic meaning and a meaning based on individuals' perceptions of that thing. In this case, the meaning that the participant ascribed to being gay herself was also based on activities and interactions with people and what emerges from these interactions are two types of meanings. Firstly, her intrinsic meaning of what gayness is and, secondly, the perceptions she had developed in her experiences and activities, ideas, memories, *etc.* Her perceptions about gay individuals, which were arguably the result of social interactions and the socialisation process, might have influenced the interaction behaviour between her and her colleagues. The meaning of what it means to be gay – what gay people look like, *etc.* – are formed in the context of social interaction. These meanings are processed and modified through an interpretative process.

In summation: these results support the argument that there are elements that are likely to encourage an individual to stop avoiding or concealing his/her sexual identity in the organisation and elements that will influence the gay individual's decision to disclose or not to disclose his/her sexual identity. It is envisioned that this decision will be dependent on his/her encounter with each colleague with whom s/he interacts and will be unique to that encounter. However, just as there are elements that will encourage disclosure, there are those that will influence non-disclosure, due to various reasons, such as, but not limited to, fear of rejection.

Once the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure have been evaluated by a gay individual in relation to a colleague, s/he will be at a cross roads and will need to decide if s/he will use communication strategies to continue avoiding disclosure concealing his/her sexual identity, or to disclose his/her sexual identity. It should, however, be considered that, when someone else discloses his/her sexual identity, the gay individual will not have control of disclosure. The self-preservation communication strategies are discussed in the next section.

5.5 Self-preservation communication strategies

Figure 5.2 presents the communication strategies found to be used by gay individuals while they are avoiding disclosure or concealing their sexual identity, while deciding if or how to tell a colleague that they are gay.

Figure 5.2: Self-preservation communication strategies

This section focuses on the self-preservation communication strategies that gay individuals use when they are deciding if or how they plan to disclose their sexual identity. The next three strategies are the broad themes that emerged from the data as possible

self-preservation communication strategies that gay individuals may use while deciding if and/or how they will or will not disclose their sexual identity to colleagues.

In the section that follows, self-preservation communication strategies are evident from the findings of the interviews and narratives and will be discussed as follows:

- *Avoidance strategies,* which include any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' avoidance of disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague. Examples include, but are not limited to, avoiding discussions about personal information with their colleagues, or avoiding or deflecting questions about their personal lives. This also includes gay individuals avoiding disclosure of their sexual identity or concealing being gay, being selective of whom they choose to, or only telling half-truths – even lying – about the fact that they are gay, even if only for a short period.
- *Personal pronoun game,* which refers to any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' use of personal pronouns when referring to a partner or prospective partner prior to disclosure of their sexual identity, in order to avoid a colleague knowing what the gender of their partner is. For example, using "they" or "we", instead of gender specific personal pronouns such as "her" or "him". This theme also includes the use of purposeful strategic communication, such as the use of gender neutral words such as "partner" or "my other half", as opposed to gender specific terms like "husband", "wife" or "boyfriend " and "girlfriend".
- *Non-conforming strategies,* which involve any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' non-conformity to disclosure of their sexual identity because of working in a heteronormative environment.

5.5.1 Avoidance strategies

This theme refers to gay individuals avoiding disclosure of their sexual identity and/or concealing being gay, being selective of whom they choose to disclose to, or telling a lie of commission or a lie of omission about the fact that they are gay, even if only for a short period. Lies of commission would be telling someone something that is not true or twisting the truth into something that suites an individual. In contrast, a lie of omission is leaving something important out of a statement. Participants may decide to either use a lie of commission or omission to a colleague about their sexual identity to avoid the perceived judgment they deem that they may experience. This could be considered as a protection mechanism, so that a gay individual does not have to disclose his/her sexual identity. In some instances, the participants had lied to someone that they did not know

well or with whom they did not share a friendship or close bond. In other instances, the participants lied to someone with whom they were actually friends. One of the participants provided an example of how she lied to a friend for quite some time before disclosing and the feelings associated with that *… [Paul] only recently found out I was gay. [He] thought I was single all this time and the thing is it was actually me a little bit as well because he would be like 'aaahhh us single people' and I would be like 'ja' [Afrikaans word for yes].* This example has more ramifications than lying to a colleague with whom the participant did not have an established relationship, which is a higher risk, because it could not only mean shifting the co-constructed social reality and influencing the communication, but could also damage the existing relationship when the truth is eventually revealed.

Some participants explained that they did not utilise a lie of commission, but rather a lie of omission where they, for example, explained calling a partner a friend. Participants using this communication self-preservation communication strategy explained how doing this gave them the opportunity to avoid explaining who the person in their photographs or on their *Facebook* page was, or the person whom they always brought up in conversations. The following is an example that confirms this *… before I came out as gay, I would not tell anyone and would introduce my girlfriend as my "friend"*.

These acts of inferring that a partner is merely a friend seem to be a way of neutralising disclosure. They are juxtaposed by some participants saying that they would not lie and say a partner is a friend, but neither would they just share the truth. If the colleague assumes someone is a friend, then the gay individual would not correct them, but if they asked directly, then s/he would not lie. Therefore, they used avoidance as a communication strategy, so as not to have to tell the truth. Although it could still be considered using lying as an avoidance technique, it puts the onus of disclosure on the colleague. In other words, if a colleague asks the gay individual who the individual is to whom she was referring, she would tell the truth; otherwise, she would avoid it with a lie of omission "*… no, it will come up – I won't tell people. If they ask me straight out, I won't deny it. But if we in conversation and I would say talk about my personal life and I would say ja [Afrikaans word for yes], we go shopping on the weekend and they will ask ja, who's we – and then I will say - myself and [Jackie] – and then they like is that your friend - I'll say yes until they put two and two together, which they usually do. But if you ask me*

straight out and people know that about me - ask me straight out and I'll give you the answer...

The second example is similar to the first one, in that the participant used a lie of omission to avoid telling the truth and, in both cases, they used avoidance by keeping quiet to perpetuate the lie. However, in the following example, the participant raised two points of significance. Firstly, that, if someone is from a different culture or religion to one that the gay individual perceives as a more accepting culture or religion, then the colleague may be less accepting of gay individuals from their perspective. Secondly, this example has an element of non-conformity (discussed later), in that gay individuals' private lives are not a colleague's and/or client's concern and they do not need to know about. *No – it's just like – sometimes when you work some of the others [colleagues] that don't know you – that's a different culture or religion - then they would ask you 'so what does your husband say when you work this late at night and whatever?' I don't wanna go into a discussion with them so I just say, no it's fine with them. That's it. I don't say anything more than that, because it's not their business what's happening in my private life. 'Cos I don't ask them what their husbands or wives say because they working late at night. If they have negative thoughts or feelings towards it, I will just keep quiet about it*. The researcher then asked what if they say, for example, 'your husband', would you then disclose, and the participant responded *… I don't correct them – I just keep quiet*. In this case, the participant was using a lie of commission about her partner, with the justification that she lied, because she had the right to privacy. Although this argument does have merit, it is still considered as utilisation of a lie of commission to avoid discussing her sexual identity.

In the third example, the participant gave an anecdotal account of when she ignored questions as an avoidance strategy: *… I went away for work and I hid my sexual orientation from people. I would speak to my partner on the phone during our days off, and ignore questions about who I was talking to*. Ignoring is also a form of avoidance, although this example uses a slightly different form of lying – hiding facts or information in a strategic way – which can be considered a lie of omission.

Some participants shared a more physical type of avoidance, namely, when they physically left the environment or made excuses to leave when any conversations of a personal nature occurred, or when they were in interactions that might force them to

disclose their sexual identity. Some participants indicated that they just physically left the setting, or made an excuse and left as communication of a personal nature came up. However, one or two of the participants stayed engaged, while avoided telling the truth. *I was outside having a cigarette and she was like when are you going to start dating or she said something and I possibly said something like 'I am going on a date'. So she said 'oh, who is the lucky guy*. The participant continued to explain how someone came and interrupted the discussion and she was relieved, because she did not have to lie, as she would have avoided it.

Another participant explained how he often used avoidance when conversations came up about, for instance, the weekend and he wanted to engage, but did not want to disclose. This example also includes elements of deflection as an avoidance strategy *… If somebody would mention something, I'd say 'oh ja [Afrikaans word for yes], no I, I did this', you know, like at one stage, right in the beginning, they like oh, where'd you go, like last night, oh no I went for dinner. Oh, with who? No, I went on a date – and I'd just stop there*. However, he expressed that *… it was great to just be myself, and have people know. From that point on, I decided that I did not need to hide from my peers*. This example also illustrates the relief gay individuals may feel when disclosure actually happens and that much of the anxiety and possible negative perceptions reside with the gay individual him/herself and the hype s/he creates around disclosure, which, for the most part, goes well and, in most cases actually leads to improved communication (re-communication). This is discussed in Chapter 6, where it is pointed out how the gay individual and his/her colleagues learn to communicate again within an altered co-constructed social reality of both knowing the truth.

In collocation to the more extreme forms of avoidance strategies, the next category that emerged within the theme of avoidance involves participants being selective about to whom they disclose their sexual identity in the organisation. Some of these reasons for avoidance include a perceived risk of loss of income, because the person to whom they are disclosing is a client, someone the gay individual perceives as judgemental. Although mentioned in previous examples, this is a deliberate attempt at being selective, based on the characteristics the gay individual believes a colleague to possess. One of the participants enunciated that *… In general, people who I considered conservative or not supportive of gay rights, the conversation was avoided. This was in my younger years*. The last comment in this quotation about a strategy or example being in an individual's

"younger years" was something that came up in a number of interviews.– When participants were younger or newly disclosing their sexual identity, they were more concerned about the communication they used to disclose or how people would react, which is why they often avoided disclosure for longer periods. However, as time and experience served the participants, they altered their self-preservation communication strategies and the reality-altering event (the actual disclosure of their sexual identity).

Another participant similarly expounded that *… I often feel uncomfortable disclosing to people, in particular, those whom I consider to possibly be judgmental, conservative or older colleagues whom I think may not get it as much as younger ones. In instances like this, I try everything to avoid disclosure and sometimes even lie. For example, I was once at a work function away from home and was asked if my husband minds me traveling for work and I said no he does not*. This example intermingles selective disclosure, which is discussed in Chapter 6, with the afore-mentioned avoidance strategy of lies of commission. These two examples also illustrate that much of the negativity surrounding communication disclosure residing in isolated circumstances and or locales that can become dangerous to disclose are mainly within the participant's own intrapersonal communication, but the actuality is not as negative as they perceive or anticipate it to be.

Some participants proclaimed things that imply that there are times that they feel socially, emotionally or psychologically ill equipped to disclose their sexual identity. One participant rationalised how *At first, I was not sure how to tell people*. For others, it was about their own personality traits: *… I am shy and did not know how to bring this subject up. So I didn't. And everyone knew who my partner was, she came to pick me up all the time, and I was always with her. It became a joke, she was referred to as the 'driver', when it would have been so much easier to just come out and tell everyone who she was (even though they had already figured it out)*. In juxtaposition to some participants not feeling equipped to deal with the disclosure, the participants perceived that colleagues would not be able to handle the disclosure. *It sometimes feels we as gay people must make others feel comfortable and test the waters first before you openly admit being gay. If you gauge that someone may be homophobic you rather avoid the subject or your home life completely before admitting it to someone who may "reject" you*.

5.5.2 Personal pronoun game

One of the themes that occurred extensively in the data analysis was participants' use of personal pronouns that were gender neutral, such as "we", "they" and "us", when

speaking about their personal lives and/or partners, so that people would not know they are gay. This theme includes any elements that demonstrate participants' use of personal pronouns when referring to a partner or prospective partner prior to disclosure of their sexual identity, in order to avoid colleagues knowing the gender of their partner. For example, using pronouns like "they" or "we" 'instead of gender-specific personal pronouns, such as "she" or "he". Some participants brought this up spontaneously, while others were asked by the researcher if they ever "play the pronoun game" – i.e. utilise pronouns as a strategy to avoid disclosure or conceal their sexual identity. One of the participants summarised this point up by expressing that he will *… play the pronoun game as well. I think one has to use the pronoun game; we are the minority and forever will be*.

Other examples of the pronoun game being used involved participants being new in a team. One of the participants articulated that when *… I was in a new team, people I hadn't interacted with and I used to play the pronoun game a lot because I didn't know if they knew - like even with my boss*. For some participants, it was not only about a new team: they also resorted to the use of pronouns when they could not gauge a colleague's feelings about gay individuals. *When I cannot gauge how people may react to me being gay I use pronouns to avoid disclosure such as refer to my partner and I do something as 'we went here' or 'the two of us prefer going to a hotel'.*

The two gender-neutral terms that were mentioned a number of times were "us" and "we" when referring to a partner. One of the participants stated *… I won't talk about my personal life. I'll just say we, we, we. I won't say who the other person is*. Whilst some participants expressed using personal pronouns as an avoidance strategy, others used personal pronouns when they did not know someone. For example, one gay individual justifies that *… when you speak to someone that doesn't know and that you just feel has nothing to do with your life, that you don't want to share your personal life with, you'll just say 'ja, we going somewhere'* ["Ja" is an Afrikaans word for "yes"]. *So you just don't say it outright 'me and my partner' or whatever, just we, we, we – or 'me and my partner' because your partner can be male or female*.

The theme also includes the use of strategic communication tools in interpersonal communication, because, as was argued in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4.1), this is planned, purposeful and symbolic communication. In this case, it is the planned and purposeful

use of gender-neutral words to refer to a partner, such as, “partner” or “my other half”, as opposed to husband/ wife or boyfriend/ girlfriend.

As was highlighted in Chapter 2 (*Section 2.2.6)* by Blumer (1986:4–10), interaction is an ongoing process that involves the cognitive process of interpretation, which implies that the meaning of symbols is in a constant state of flux. Symbols have meanings that are constructed by individuals and understood by a wider group of people, because they represent specific ideas. This interpretative meaning and flexible movement of the meaning of symbols from situation-to-situation, context-to-context and group-to-group is significant for the second part of the theme of the pronoun game, as it is the deconstruction of the word “partner”. The participants’ elucidated that, in the South African context, the word “partner” is used as a hinting mechanism because of the perception of someone assuming a “partner” means the same sex and thus gay. – The meaning of the word “partner” has this connotation. One participant's statement supported this notion. He said, *In earlier years, it would take me a bit longer to start using male pronouns (or his name) in these conversations, and I would try to keep my statements gender neutral at first, but that is no longer the case. This being said, the use of the word “partner” mostly, but not always, gets the point across quite easily in South Africa*. In other situations or contexts, for example, outside of South Africa, this may not be the case. In fact, in some countries, people use “partner” deliberately for two reasons. The first is to be inclusive of everyone: from a symbolic interactionist perspective, it communicates that sexual orientation is irrelevant and that an individual should not be able to tell if someone is gay or heterosexual from the language use. The second reason deals with equality, because a word such as “wife” is not power-neutral. The researcher asked some participants if they thought the word “partner” in South Africa implies that the person is gay. *Yes, because I have heard someone use it before and I was like ‘ooohhh she is like me’…and she wasn’t and I was like ‘oooh you also are a lesbian’ and they were like ‘no’*. This directly aligns to the afore-mentioned points on symbolic interactionism. Moreover, it should be noted that, in the South African, context, “partner” may also mean business partner, which does confuse some people, particularly if they are not suspecting that the person using the word “partner” may be gay.

5.5.3 Non-conforming strategies

This theme is developed around participants who are non-conforming to disclosure of their sexual identity because of working in a heteronormative environment.

Non-conforming strategies relate to heteronormativity and how, in a heteronormative dominant society, gay people may feel they are compelled to disclose their sexual identity, whereas heterosexual people do not have to disclose that they are heterosexual. As indicated in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.3) by Robinson (2017), heteronormativity is a system of norms, values, discourses and beliefs, which are constructed as the natural order in a given society and has hegemonic dominance as the given social system. Anything that goes against this system would be considered as going against the norm – i.e. against that what people have been socialised into perceiving as "normal". Therefore, conformity to heteronormative norms is thus the expectation and pressure that gay individuals will be faced with in the organisational context.

Several participants' quotations addressed the concept of heteronormativity, although they did not actually use this term. It was actually the inverse – a type of defiance that heterosexual people do not feel pressure to share and disclose personal information; so why should gay people have to do so continually. The participants' interaction behaviour with each of these colleagues was based on participants' perceptions, the meaning that the participants' ascribe to the communication behaviour that they experience with each colleague, as well as the participants' perceptions of their colleagues' possible reaction to the disclosure of their sexual identity. Language, meaning and the way in which individuals' use language to exchange meaning and, in turn, co-construct social reality, are significant, because, in the context of symbolic interactionism, social reality is a set of social constructs. Each time the participant interacts with his/her colleagues, meaning is exchanged and/or shared meaning becomes more aligned. Many of the participants in this study stated that they did not feel that they should have to use language that implied that they were gay to disclose, because heterosexual people did not have to do so. One participant directly said: *I'm just not gonna walk in and blurt out 'hello, I'm gay'. 'Cos they don't come and say 'hello, I'm straight'.* Another participant echoed this by saying, *I don't generally just tell people that I am gay. I never have. It is not that I am ashamed but for me, straight people don't come up to me and tell me that they are straight so I have no need to go up to someone and tell them that I am gay*. A third participant expressed similar sentiments, but showed a little more defiance in her response by stating that *… if you ask me straight out and people know that about me – ask me straight out and I'll give you the answer but I don't have to walk with that on my shoulder because straight people don't have to say 'I'm in a straight relationship' so why must I do that?*

Another participant also expressed defiance at the fact that heteronormative values underpinning organisational contexts and, therefore, made a conscious and strategic decision not to conform and disclose, but rather to disclose only when asked. The participant said *… I didn't actually announce to my employers or colleagues that I am gay. I made a conscious decision not to. I felt at the time that straight people don't "come out" as straight and so I wasn't going to disclose unless I was asked or it came up in conversation*. However, the participant then decided, on his terms, to bring his partner to an event, thereby, controlling the disclosure himself. He said, *"the time came at our year-end function when I RSVP'd for my partner and the response I got was great. No judgment or negative vibes at all*.

Other participants expressed that, although they were more open now than they had previously been, they still would only disclose when asked directly, for example: *I would say I am more open about it now, I will tell them if they ask outright or any related type question. If they don't ask I won't tell them but I don't attempt to hide it anymore like I did in the past*. As referenced previously, it does seem that, when participants have more inner peace and are more open about disclosing their sexual identity, they feel less pressure and anxiety around disclosing and often spend a far shorter time utilising self-preservation communication strategies, if at all. Moreover, some gay individuals become resolved to the notion that there will be some colleagues who do not react positively or do not accept an individual being gay, but being expectant of this, makes it less damaging. One of the participants explained that *… I am strong in my belief that I have a right to be who I am and there will always be the odd person that will not handle the fact that I am gay well, but I will not allow that it affects me negatively in any way*.

Many participants considered it inequitable that the pressure is on them to disclose, but not for heterosexual people to do the same. This type of defiance (defiance to disclose, because gay individuals work and live in heteronormative environments) was annotated by multiple participants, implying that gay people should not have to disclose their sexual identity, because heterosexual people do not have to do so. In fact, whether or not someone is married or single, gay or heterosexual should not have any relevance. Some participants were relatively placid in their responses, but none-the-less defiant in terms of not feeling that they have to disclose or that anyone has the right to ask them, because the same standards do not apply for heterosexual people. *It's like, would a heterosexual*

person need to come up and divulge all this information about them to someone else? If they weren't like close to them like I don't feel it's something that, in my mind, it shouldn't make a difference so it's not that I need to tell you and it's if you know, great, I'm not ashamed about it. But if I want to tell someone it's because that person's close to me, I trust them. I don't want to be lying to that person … If I am in a new division with say 30 people I am not going to just say hi, I'm gay.

From the self-preservation communication strategies, it can be acknowledged that there are times when the participants stated that they felt awkward and uncomfortable about lying to a colleague that they are gay. This seems to be primarily because they operate in a heteronormative environment. Therefore, it is almost a positive feeling as if being gay has some sort of stigma attached to it and/or the possibility that some colleagues will react negatively, based on their beliefs and worldviews. Hence, avoiding disclosure until the gay individual is more certain that it will be "safe" is the position that many participants took. However, most of the participants in some way express a feeling of defiance as to why they should feel this way, because heterosexual people do not have to disclose. Yet, if a participant did not disclose, colleagues often felt hurt or betrayed, because the participant did not trust him/her enough to disclose. This may cause strain in their professional interaction behaviour. One participant encompassed this point as follows: *I have found that the people who I have told actually get hurt that you have not told them for such a long time. They like 'What, and you don't tell me this? How could you think I would think that?'* These difficulties that gay individuals face when considering disclosing their sexual identity suggest that society should become more inclusive and neutral in the way in which communication takes place. For example, regardless of sexual orientation or if someone is married or dating, they should consider using the term "partner", which is gender neutral, as opposed to heteronormative terms such as "wife", "husband", "girlfriend" and "boyfriend".

For some of the participants, announcing their sexual identity became a disclosure strategy or a spontaneous form of communication. Others saw the act of announcing they are gay as another way of gay people being expected to act differently from heterosexual individuals. There is an element of defiance in not doing so, suggesting that societies should move away from heteronormativity and heteronormative terms. One of the participants explained that "*… if the discussion leads to gay people and they're derogatory towards gay people, I will defend gay people, not saying I am gay until they*

figure it out themselves. And if they ask me openly 'are you gay?', then I won't deny it. But I won't just blurt it out. Another participant explained how she did not see why she had to speak to anyone at work about anything personal: *… I think it is all right if you have to tell people if they don't know but I don't see why they need to know and I don't see why they want to talk to you [about personal matters] at work*. This participant not only did not believe that gay individuals should have to disclose their sexual identity; she did not even feel that any individual, whether gay or heterosexual, should form friendships at work. When probed, the participant continued by saying … *I think its if you take an interest in someone at work it is nice if they tell you and take an interest but if it is just someone working there, why do I have to go to them? It's not my friend. I don't talk to you and it has nothing to do with you. Why should I go tell say, 'oh, I am a lesbian'. It has nothing to do with you. Just like I don't tell them 'I have two dogs and I ride my* bicycle'. I don't tell them that so why should I have to tell them this, so why should I tell them anything else?

5.6 Conclusion

Two prominent aspects occurred in the analysis of the findings of the first two dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework – i.e. elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure. Firstly, each participant decided on his/her self-preservation communication strategies on a context-by-context and colleague-by-colleague basis at the moment of the reality-altering event (the disclosure). Secondly, there are various elements that influence when and how gay individuals disclose or do not disclose their sexual identity to colleagues in the organisation.

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings and an interpretation of the findings of the first two themes of the re-communication conceptual framework. This was done, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure, as well as the self-preservation communication strategies that gay individuals use to avoid disclosure or to conceal their sexual identity, or while they are deciding if or how they will disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within the organisational context. The primary findings were overall, when participants perceived colleagues as sharing a meaningful relationship with them, they were often encouraged to disclose their sexual identity to ensure that they could maintain their close relationships. At times, it appeared that the gay individuals were actually overridden by a sense of guilt or dissonance in not disclosing to a colleague, particularly when they had

formed a meaningful relationship with them. The more a participant trusted a colleague, the more likely they were to disclose. It was colleagues' attitudes and behaviour as perceived by the gay individuals that both encouraged and discouraged disclosure. If the gay individual perceived someone as having a positive and non-judgemental attitude, they were more likely to disclose to them, and if they had an attitude that perpetuated possible discrimination or negativity towards gay individuals, then participants felt discouraged to disclose to them. It is almost as if gay individuals use a degree of open mindedness as a gauge to determine whether they will disclose to someone.

The multifaceted aspects of the theme of fear of rejection discouraged disclosure. This was coupled with the perception that religious people and those with conservative cultural and tribal views were more difficult for the participants to disclose to, as they feared the response and possible rejection from these colleagues. It was interesting to note that the way in which the influence of the organisational climate and/or culture was positioned. – An inclusive organisational culture, the types of organisational policies and the language people use in the organisational context either made participants feel more or less willing to disclose. On a macro level, members of society should also engage in more inclusive communication practices, in order to ensure collective inclusivity in the micro organisational context.

The elements that influence disclosure are influencers of disclosure and the way of disclosure. The self-preservation communication strategies, on the other hand, are focused on the communication strategies that gay individuals use to interact with colleagues when they are still avoiding disclosure, concealing their sexual identity and or deciding if or how they will disclose their sexual identity.

The researcher explored the ways in which the participants avoided disclosing their sexual identity, from physically leaving a location, to changing the subject and avoiding conversations. Many of the participants explained that, when they were trying to avoid telling a colleague they were gay, they would often replace their partners' gender with a gender-neutral pronoun. For example, instead of saying, "She and I went on a date this weekend", they would say, "We went on a date this weekend".

The last theme that emerged from the data participants expressing feeling almost a sense of defiance against the conformity of heterosexual norms and having to justify

themselves in the use of strategies that emphasised their non-conformance. The participants stated that they would not disclose, because heterosexual individuals do not have to disclose. From a communication and symbolic interactionist perspective, it implies the communication used in a heteronormative society is not inclusive. When everyone uses neutral language, everyone has the choice to disclose or not, without having to share personal information that is not deemed relevant in an organisational context.

There may be other self-preservation communication strategies that gay individuals use, but the strategies discussed in this chapter are those that are mentioned from the interviews. The key findings indicate that the duration of the use of self-preservation communication strategies may differ, depending on how open the gay individual is and/or how comfortable s/he feels with a given colleague. However, regardless of how long most of the participants engaged in self-preservation, even if for a moment, they used a self-preservation communication strategy, because few people just walk directly up to someone and just says “Hi, I am gay.” Participants explained that they generally get to know others first, before they disclose personal information.

The aim of this chapter and the next is to develop the conceptual framework of re-communication that emerged from the themes. The re-communication conceptual framework, presented in Chapter 7, grounds the data analysis that was conducted by identifying sub-themes relevant to each broad theme, and provides a description of each theme, showing their interconnectedness. The proposed re-communication conceptual framework provides a comprehensive and holistic description of the elements that influence a gay individual in using communication strategies to disclose or conceal his/her sexual identity to colleagues in the organisational context. It was also noted that, as long as the self-preservation communication strategies are in the gay individuals’ locus of control, disclosure may occur by means of spontaneous communication, which is an unplanned disclosure. However, disclosure may have an external locus of control, which occurs when someone else discloses the sexual identity of the gay individual without his/her consent.

The next chapter presents the analysis, evaluation and discussion of the remaining two dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework, namely, the reality-altering event itself, which is the disclosure of sexual identity. This is followed by an in-

depth analysis and interpretation of positive and negative experiences of disclosure and how the disclosure has altered the participants' interaction behaviour post-disclosure, which is termed *re-communication*.

CHAPTER 6: RE-COMMUNICATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) AND RE-COMMUNICATION

Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today. ~ McKee

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings and interpretation of the themes that led to the emergence of the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure and the self-preservation communication strategies of the re-communication conceptual framework were presented. This was done to gain an in-depth understanding, through thick descriptions, of these two dominant themes and their related broad themes and sub-themes of the re-communication conceptual framework and the findings that emerged from the data extrapolated from the interviews and narratives.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the themes that lead to the emergence of the final two parts of the re-communication conceptual framework. These themes, which were developed from the thematic content analysis, provide thick descriptions of and insights into these broad themes and their resultant sub-themes. As previously indicated, in any reality-altering event, either strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual who experienced a reality-altering event or by persons or forms of communication external to the individual.

In the context of this study, the disclosure becomes the reality-altering event, which is the first theme discussed in this chapter. The final dominant theme of the re-communication conceptual framework is re-communication, which is also discussed in this chapter. Re-communication is the communication phenomenon that is identified, explained and labelled in this study, whereby there is a perceived alteration in communication post-disclosure, due to the altered reality. In this study, it is argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague is altered from a position of being unaware the individual is gay to knowing the gay individual's true sexual identity. Based on the new information of the true sexual identity of the gay

individual, the co-constructed social reality between these individuals should have altered.

This chapter documents the interpretation of and insights into the findings related to the themes that led to the emergence of the reality-altering event participants used to disclose their sexual identity. It also documents the interpretation of and insights into the various themes that emerged from the reality-altering event. Once participants have utilised the self-preservation communication strategies and, when they are ready, or, in some cases, when they are forced (e.g. a colleague starting a rumour or telling others) they select, either consciously or subconsciously, spontaneously or strategically a form of communication to disclose their sexual identity. It should be remembered that the act of disclosure may be out of the gay individuals' control. The act of disclosure seems to create more anxiety for participants than the self-preservation communication strategies. This may be, because, during the time when the gay individual is deciding if and/or how the disclosure of his/her sexual identity will occur, s/he still feels secure and does not have increased levels of anxiety, because colleagues do not know they are gay. Once the participants have made the decision to disclose and/or when their sexual identity has been disclosed by a colleague, then the impact on the interaction behaviour begins to take effect. The chapter ends with a conclusion summarising the key conjectures drawn from the data and explained in the chapter.

6.2 Findings on the reality-altering event (Disclosure)

Figure 6.1 presents the reality-altering event, i.e. when the act of disclosure occurs. Disclosure can occur strategically, spontaneously and/or can be externally controlled by someone else disclosing on behalf of the gay individual.

Figure 6.1: Reality-altering event

Three themes emerged that are related to the reality-altering event (disclosure of sexual identity). Firstly, communication disclosure strategies, which occur when the communication linked to the disclosure of the gay individual's sexual identity is planned, monitored and executed under the control of the gay individual. Secondly, there are spontaneous forms of communication disclosure, which are used when the disclosure of a gay individual's sexual identity happens in a more spontaneous, less planned way. This disclosure is still meted out by the gay individuals themselves, although not in a strategic manner. Lastly, there are times when the locus of control of disclosure is outside of the control of the gay individual, because the disclosure is externally controlled by someone else, such as a colleague disclosing the gay individual's sexual identity. The following sub-themes, as derived from the findings and narratives, will be discussed:

- Communication disclosure strategies:
  - *Defiance* – Any elements that demonstrate that the way in which the gay individual has disclosed his/her sexual identity in a brazen or bold way, including the use of shock tactics. It is important to note that defiance is only a communication strategy when it is a planned and considered disclosure. If it were spontaneous, then it would form part of the sub-theme of 'it just happened'.

- *Strategic leading and communication* – When gay individuals make a choice to communicate in a way that results in them disclosing their sexual identity by chance, but still by their own choice. This includes elements of gay individuals in some way hinting about being gay or leading a colleague to find out that s/he is gay. It would include gay individuals strategically communicating in such a way that leads a colleague to ask a gay individual questions resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity.

- Spontaneous communication disclosures:
  - *Defensive reaction to ridicule* – Elements when gay individuals feel prompted to disclose their sexual identity, after a colleague has made a derogatory comment or displayed derogatory behaviour about gay individuals in their presence. The defensive reaction often leads gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity.
  - *It 'just happened'* – Includes elements that demonstrate that the disclosure of sexual identity within the organisational context can occur with no specific communication strategies, but rather spontaneously. In this context, a gay individual's sexual identity is disclosed during everyday conversations between him/herself and his/her colleagues, who may piece it together themselves, based on interactions with the gay individual. This theme is also categorised by gay individuals having no recollection of how their sexual identity were disclosed or just "blurting out" this information.
- Externally controlled disclosures:
  - *'Outed' by others* – Elements that demonstrate that gay individuals' sexual identity has been revealed by others or has been revealed accidentally. For example, gay individuals could be intentionally or unintentionally "outed", if a colleague finds out that they are gay via a rumour, gossip or grapevine communication, and the gay individual becomes aware of it. Another example is a colleague being unaware that others are not aware of the individual being gay and "outs" the gay individual to colleagues who do not know the individual is gay.
  - *Direct questioning* – Elements of gay individuals being pushed to disclose their sexual identity by others directly asking them questions about their sexual identity, partner or personal life by a colleague. The gay individual may decide not to answer, but if s/he does answer, then the disclosure has been prompted by external people asking questions.

6.2.1 Communication disclosure strategies

Communication disclosure strategies are examples of the communication being linked to the disclosure of a participant's sexual identity is planned, monitored and executed under the control of the gay individual him/herself.

6.2.1.1 Defiance

Defiance was not a strategy that many participants identified as using. A form of defiance that was extrapolated from the data was participants disclosing their sexual identity in a brazen or bold way, or by using shock tactics. In other words, when participants disclose their sexual identity to a colleague by eliciting some form of shock. It is important to note that defiance is only a communication strategy when it is a planned and considered disclosure strategy. If it were spontaneous, then it would have been part of the sub-theme of "it just happened".

One of the participants used an extremely illustrative anecdote of a personal experience to encapsulate how, in this case, he made a decision prior to arriving at work to defy the threats that a man whom he was dating was making about coming to his workplace and disclosing his sexual identity to everyone at his workplace. Instead, the gay individual decided he would announce his sexual identity to colleagues in his own way and by his own c 1hoice, knowing it would likely illicit shock. *Very few gay people defend themselves. I was married to women and got divorced and had one casual fling [sex] buddy who came around and he was much younger and he threatened to come to work and tell everyone I was gay and I had not told anyone. It was long ago and it was risky in those years to come out and I got angry and said please do come and I intend having the police there. I walked into the office in the morning; I worked in a small open plan office. I walked in and said 'hello, I am gay' or walked past their desks and said 'I am gay', until I had told everyone*. He explained how this forward approach of just announcing his sexual identity to people, without any prompting and unexpectedly shocked his colleagues, in particular because this was some years ago and in a time when it was considered risky to disclose sexual identity and people were far less vocal publicly about their sexual identity.

Another participant explained how she sometimes used shock tactics by announcing that she is gay to ensure the disclosure happened quickly and with only a few questions. She illustrated a defensive mechanism by announcing if someone had a problem with it, they

must discuss it with her face-to-face and not speak about it behind her back. In this way, she was possibly trying to curb rumour and/or gossip and being the topic in grapevine communication. As explicated in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4.2), grapevine communication primarily flows through an organisation via word of mouth and spreads rapidly throughout an organisation. Part of grapevine communication also includes rumour and gossip and grapevine communication is often responsible for making individuals feel vulnerable and threatened (Alparslan & Kılınç 2015:115–116; Cacciattolo 2015:83; Enyia & Orokor 2016:37–38; Markovic & Salamzadeh 2018:22–23; Nwogbaga *et al* 2015; Robinson & Thelen 2018). She said, *I used to be very careful how I told people and plan it for months but now I have seen the best way of telling people I am gay is to literally just shock them. I will pick a conversation where we are discussing personal things and then say, 'by the way I just want to be honest with you about something, I am gay. Can I please ask if you have any issues about it that you rather come speak about it with me to my face'*. The researcher then asked if this did shock people, at which she responded, *You can definitely see people are shocked and then they usually say they don't have an issue with it but they appreciate my honesty*.

Similarly, another participant explained that he used to just bring it up in conversations and even announced it, but after reflecting on some of the responses, he had altered his communication disclosure strategy, from just announcing it as a defiance tactic to being less overt. *Initially, I was totally over it and so would be overly open literally blurting it out and in people's faces. I have toned it down now – I won't hide it but I became less overt - you catch more flies with honey I have learnt*. He also displayed cognitive complexity. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.2), the variety and complexity of an individual's personal constructs and interpretive schemes determines his/her cognitive complexity. In this case, cognitive complexity was displayed by recognising that he disclosed differently to different people, depending on or judging the current context … *I feel that I tell people differently depending on the situation*. This individual might have been prompted to be less overt, because he expressed that, in the past … *I have gotten myself into trouble and some people have found me to be inappropriate or tell inappropriate stories.*

Another example is that of a participant announcing his/her sexual identity, but in a planned manner, because it was not spontaneous, but rather prompted by a particular event. In this case, it occurred when this participant was required to travel with

colleagues. She explained how she had a conversation with the person doing the bookings, saying that she was gay and that she did not want to share a room with anyone. She explained that one of the reasons for this was that she did not want to have any accusations later that she was inappropriate with another colleague. This aligns with the discussions on elements that discourage disclosure, under fear of rejection, where it was explained that it is interesting to note that many gay individuals, both men and women, have experiences in which they are prejudiced after disclosure, in that people think that, just because someone is gay, they will be sexually drawn to them. Therefore, they feel the need to emphasise that they are not gay, in case the gay individual may be interested in them. This participant explained, *I always make clear if they book me into a room – I want my own room. I don't want problems afterward so it's the only thing I am a little bit … so pedantic with … That is, where I will actually go and tell people 'Look, I am a lesbian and I am not sharing and I don't care who you are and I don't care what your HR policies are I don't care, I don't share*'.

6.2.1.2 Strategic leading and communication

This broad theme includes elements where participants in some way hint to a colleague that they are gay. It includes gay individuals' strategically communicating in such a way that it leads a colleague to ask the gay individual questions, resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity. In the first example, the participant told a story as if those listening should know he is speaking about a love interest and, if people do not notice the hinting, he states it as a rhetorical question, for example, *You know we are dating, right?* He explained, *I am 'what you see is what you get', so invariably I would tell a story about my partner at the time and I would stand and chat and because someone does not know the context they don't understand the context and things get lost in translation, then I feel I have to say we were doing this and you can see the story doesn't click, so then I would, for example, say, you know I was in a relationship with [Shane] right*?

At times, the strategic leading was explained by participants as a purposeful way to illicit or prompt questions, so that the gay individual strategically gets someone to ask about his/her sexuality to provide the gay individual with an opportunity to disclose. One participant's explanation documented this, when she explained that *… people are like 'I don't know what your mother looks like' then I show them a picture that is my mother in the middle, then [Jane], then me*. The researcher then asked the participant, *Do you purposefully choose that picture like that*? The participant responded, *Yes, I do actually*

because I am like look at this other person in my life and then they say 'Is that your sister?' and then I am like, no … She did indicate that this did not always lead to immediate disclosure, as sometimes the conversation was stopped when the colleague did not ask follow up questions. However, this participant believed that by saying "no", she was actually telling the colleague in a strategic way and s/he actually made the connection him/herself.

Another aspect of strategic leading and communication is gay individuals working their partners name into a conversation, as if the colleague with whom they are communicating should know who this is. In this way, the gay individual generally either sees a colleague asking whom that is and/or feeling too awkward to question and, therefore connect what the gay individual is implying from the interaction behaviour. One participant explained this type of strategic leading and communication as follows: *I generally try to get to know people before I tell them but I kind of work [Mandy's] name in slowly…'Oh [Mandy] and I, we watched a movie'… and then I will be like, oh ja* [Afrikaans word for "yes"], *and I carry on doing it then they are like 'Who is this [Mandy]?' and then I am like 'She is my girlfriend*'.

Another participant illustrated a similar strategic leading and communication disclosure strategy when strategically hinting. She said, *I will often use my partner's name amongst a group of people who know and people who don't know making out as if they should know who I am speaking about and then they then either ask me who she is or otherwise act as if they know so then I don't have to disclose. Sometimes even when I am around people who don't know I will use her name as if they should know*. When the researcher asked if this was a deliberate communication strategy, the participant responded that it was, so that she did not have to disclose, but rather just let it come up in the conversation but that it was deliberate. Another participant explained how he skirted around the issue by referring to his partner and friend. He said, *I just – talk around it. Talk about my partner, talk about [Nick], talk about my friend or whatever because I don't have to discuss with all my colleagues my personal life. Because they don't say to me oh, I am married to a woman – a man doesn't say that to someone else – I'm married to a woman or I am married to a man, it doesn't happen that way.* This quotation illustrated participants expressing that they should not have to explain their sexual identity, because heterosexual people do not.

Shifting slightly from the previous point where the gay individual specifically used his/her partners name to prompt disclosure, some participants expressed that they would discuss their partner or sexual preference in the company of a colleague who already knew, with the purposeful or sub-conscious intention of those around them overhearing this. When this is purposeful, it directly links to the definition of strategic communication in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4.1) as a purposeful and planned form of communication that usually has a planned motive (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2009:226–227; Du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw 2014:10; Wood 2006:228). One of the participants was sharing her wedding album with colleagues, who know she is gay, and had asked to see this. In this process, another colleague found out that the individual is gay. This is evidenced by the following quotation: *She [became] aware of me being gay in a conversation where I shared my wedding album with another colleague*.

The next aspect of strategic leading and strategic communication occurs when gay individuals opt to use a work event as an opportunity to strategically hint at their sexual identity by bringing their partner to the event, a decision that leads to others finding out this individual is gay. One participant explained that *this was the first time I came out in a work scenario, and I did this by taking my partner to a work function as my date*.

An interesting type of disclosure mentioned by one participant is the use of storytelling to lead to disclosure of sexual identity. An excerpt of this narrative is as follows: *One of the examples I use to tell people I am gay is storytelling. I do training as I am in project management training and I have found over the years that one of the techniques to be able to get people to learn and understand is through storytelling because people learn really well through this and invariably I bring in stories that either state or depict me being gay or you have done something because you are gay and you share that story and that way people find out. I find that sometimes even when it is not necessary I tell a story that will link to me being gay or I say I am gay … whereas a straight person would not feel they need to or have to do this*. This participant understood the importance of storytelling and his professional identity lent itself to utilising this type of communication disclosure strategy. – The participant was a professional responsible for management training and, therefore, he identified storytelling as an effective tool for his job. It is a flexible interpretation of an individual understanding his professional identity, which gave the participant leverage to decide how to train other colleagues. In this way, storytelling became as a means of not only incorporating dissemination of his professional skill, but

also a means of disclosing his sexual identity. Storytelling is considered an effective way of sharing experiences and today, it is used more frequently in organisations.

Interestingly, social media have also become a tool that people use to get to know one another and/or about colleagues. Even human resource management departments at organisations often evaluate potential and/or employees based on their social media profiles. One or two of the participants explained how social media made them more open, as it is often a public way of disclosing, although it is a personal platform and social media pages should be monitored and planned as a strategic tool, not only to hint at disclosure, but also for professionalism. This type of disclosure would be strategic, because the gay individual controls what s/he places on these platforms and the image that is subsequently portrayed about him/her. However, it is strategic when the gay individual is self-aware that his/her social media presence is something that could be an information repository for personal information.

One participant explained how a client found out that he is gay by seeing his wedding photos on *Facebook*. He gave the following anecdotal account of how this happened: *So you start building like a relationship with them and you know you chatting and chatting about a holiday or this or that and stuff comes up ... I mean, what 2 – 3 months ago, one of my old clients, like, he, like, obviously popped up on Facebook and what not – and so I get this SMS from him and he goes …'I see you got married and I'm thinking you can only see on one place'. So I just replied 'yes'. He says 'ah congrats, blah, blah. Let's go for lunch'."* Another participant explained, *I think some of my colleagues have found out by my Facebook profile, I mean it is obvious from there that I am married to a woman but I don't just accept anyone as a friend on Facebook*. This indicates how colleagues can find out on social media platforms that someone is gay, but this participant also noted that she was cautious of whom she allowed as a connection on Facebook. This could be because she was aware that this would lead to disclosure. It also indicates a strategy involved in selecting some colleagues over others, possibly because gay individuals realise that, if they accept someone as a friend on Facebook, their sexual identity will be publicly displayed and that colleague will see this intimate aspect of the gay individual's life. This aligns with Altman and Taylor's (1973:5–6) views in the social penetration theory in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2), in that an individual will progress on disclosure of personal information from more superficial to a more personal level. With social media platforms playing a larger role in displaying individuals' personal milestones and lives, all

individuals, whether gay or not need, to remember that, although social media are an aspect of their private life, they do affect their professional context.

Once the communication strategy that has been utilised for disclosure involves a colleague knowing that an individual is gay, based on one of the afore-mentioned or any other forms of disclosure. It is argued that there is an alteration in the co-constructed social reality between the participants and their colleagues, because the colleagues go from a position of not knowing or not being sure the participants are gay to now knowing. Based on the alteration, it is posited that, whether the colleague communicates in a positive or negative way about this disclosure to the participants, it does alter the co-constructed social reality and the interaction behaviour between the participants and their colleagues. The alternation may be marginal, e.g. the gay individual referring to his/her partner by name, instead of calling him/her a "partner".

6.2.2 Spontaneous communication disclosure

Spontaneous forms of communication disclosure occur when the disclosure happens in a more fluid or spontaneous way; in other words, when it is less planned. This disclosure is still meted out by the gay individuals themselves, but not in a strategic manner.

6.2.2.1 Defensive reaction to ridicule

The theme of *defensive reaction to ridicule* includes sub-themes of participants feeling prompted to disclose their sexual identity after a colleague has made a derogatory comment or is displaying derogatory behaviour towards gay individuals in their presence. This defence of gay individuals or defiance over gay individuals being spoken of in a derogatory manner lead participants to disclose their own sexual identity, even if they had not planned to do so at that moment. The ridicule prompted disclosure, because the gay individuals want to defend gay people.

One of the participants explained that she would defend gay people, but not necessarily disclose, unless asked directly. – *It will always depend on the type of discussion – if the discussion leads to gay people and they derogatory towards gay people, I will defend gay people, not saying I am gay until they figure it out themselves. And if they ask me openly are you gay, then I won't deny it. But I won't just blurt it out*. The researcher asked the participant if she had ever had an experience of a colleague having a derogatory conversation about gay people with her and then the other person realised that she was gay. She said, *Yes – and they apologised profusely and now they like gay people,*

whereas before they didn't like gay people because of the stigma of gay people being bad. Although there was some vindication in the apology, it should be considered that the negativity of the experience for the gay individual would still be present and, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, the message was communicated that the person thought about gay people in a negative way. Discrimination in the organisation may lead to human resource management concerns, such as harassment and/or discrimination in the organisation, which may impact negatively on the organisational climate and/or culture.

It was also elucidated that, when discrimination occurs in a superior versus a subordinate relationship, it is anxiety provoking for the gay individuals, which is understandable given the power balance in these types of relationships. One of the participants explained this by saying *… I was a young, inexperienced manager at this point, and one of the older, more established colleagues that I took to task about work issues also happened to be the one person – that I knew of – that started talking about me being gay in derogatory language. This did eventually come to a head where we had a sit-down conversation about it, and cleared the air. After this, our relationship seemed to be normal*.

The following two examples illustrate the use of derogatory language and/or displaying prejudice behaviour. In both cases, the colleagues referred to gay people as "moffies", which is an informal and offensive South African term, closely linked to the global discriminatory term "faggot", that refers to a man who is effeminate and, therefore, perceived as gay. These examples also have another category, which involves a colleague demonstrating a prejudice or dislike towards gay people in some way – often referred to as *homophobic behaviour* – and this behaviour prompts gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity. In the first example, the participant explained his narrative in the following way: *A few of us were standing in the office having a normal conversation about everyday stuff, when a gay guy walked in. He was from another floor and we did not have much to do with him. After he walked out the one lady that I had been working with for quite a couple of years said: 'did you see that moffie?' She carried on by saying that why does he not just carry himself like a man and get a wife and that he has just not met the right girl. At this stage, they did not know I was gay, as I had never told them. I just figured that straight people don't go and say, 'hi I am so and so and I am straight'. Why should I? But after she said this I felt: What gives her the right to judge? I told her that I am gay and that it is not a choice that you make, it is just the person that you are*

and that I am sure that if any gay person had a choice they would be straight. Then she decided to change her mind and said that she also has 'friends' that are like that and they are some of the friendliest people that she knows. From that day on, we were not so close anymore. While this narrative is predominantly linked to the defensive reaction to ridicule sub-theme, it also has a richness to it as it straddles multiple themes. Firstly, avoidance strategies, e.g. when the conversation started and the gay individual did not disclose. Secondly, non-conforming strategies, as discussed in self-preservation communication strategies, when gay individuals feel that they should not have to disclose their sexual identity, because heterosexual people do not have to disclose that they are heterosexual. This also brings in elements of the discussions around characteristics that discourage disclosure – i.e. when someone displays traits that the gay individual perceives as judgemental or conservative. In the final paragraph of this narrative, the gay individual explained the impact of disclosure on re-communication. This quotation is cross-referenced and explored further, later in this chapter.

From the interactions with the participants it can be deduced that, besides the interpersonal and human concerns related to speaking about others in a derogatory manner, the fact that these comments are made in an organisational context exacerbates matters. Not only is this behaviour socially undesirable within an organisational context and may negatively influence interaction behaviour, but it can also lead to multiple human resource management concerns, breakdown in communication and teamwork, policy breaches and even disciplinary action leading to possible declines in productivity, efficiency and team work. Therefore, organisations need to sensitise staff as to what is considered inappropriate conduct and interactions and what entails professional communication. Organisational management should act on inappropriate behaviour. This supports the argument that professional communication is one of the pillars of an organisation and ineffective or poor communication may affect organisational performance.

The second example also has elements of derogatory behaviour and bigotry, although the bigoted behaviour is more complex, when the person using the derogatory language is the participant's senior and/or line manager. The participant clarified that she *… was sitting in a meeting with my [senior] and he was derogatory about same sex relationships and I didn't say anything about it. I just left the office. And then a few weeks later he was making comments again and then I said to him I actually don't like the things you saying*

because I'm actually gay and he's like – he couldn't believe it in the first place and he just said no, it's not true, it can't be because that's not who you are. And then I said to him but I've never spoken to you about my personal life. And he then apologised profusely and said to me that gay people aren't that bad because he really likes me a lot. So, it was the stigma because people don't know gay people because according to them - gay people's not normal. This relates to heteronormativity and how many individuals frame things from within a heteronormative worldview and value system. The disbelief portrayed that this gay individual could not be gay, because the gay individual is "not like that" is also a response that perpetuates stereotypes that gay individuals should be a certain way. As established in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3), according to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2019) and concurred by the *Collins Dictionary,* (2019), stereotypes are preconceived ideas or characteristics about a group of individuals; in this case gay individuals. From an organisational leadership perspective, it is inferred that managers should be sensitised to dealing with staff around personal matters, because, in this example, there are multiple instances of the manager not showing any sensitivity to this subordinate. Not only can this have a negative effect on interpersonal communication and relational impact, but also, because the leader is an influencer in the organisation and in this participant's performance reviews and general management, it may lead to a negative organisational climate and/or culture and, in more extreme cases, charges can be laid against the manager. It can leave the employee feeling as if s/he is being discriminated against for his/her sexual identity. What was both interesting and concerning, is that participants who raised these issues seemed not to take them further, but rather accept this as the way people sometimes act towards gay individuals. In more extreme cases, the participants almost justified the behaviour of others towards them, thereby demonstrating that gay individuals almost accept that this is what will occur and they should just accept it.

6.2.2.2 It "Just happened"

This theme includes several sub-themes that demonstrate that the disclosure of sexual identity within the organisational context can occur with no specific communication disclosure strategies or no recollection of specific communication disclosure strategies. The gay individual's sexual identity is either disclosed during everyday conversations between themselves and their colleagues, or a colleague piece it together themselves, based on interactions with the participant. This theme is also categorised by participants having no physical recollection of how their sexual identity was disclosed or just

disclosing this information, rather than using a specific communication. As one of the participants expounded, *Well I have never really had to tell people I am gay like –- Hi my name is [Clare] and I am gay. I have just said like 'this is my wife [Judy] or my girlfriend or whoever'*.

Interestingly, many of the participants said that, in the organisational context, their sexual identity is often disclosed in everyday conversations between themselves and their colleagues and that there is no substantive event leading to the disclosure. As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4.1), this voluntary interpersonal communication allows for a more focused context than other communication contexts, because it allows for more spontaneous content changes in focus, direction and input. This is evidenced by the following quotations. In the first example, the participant specifically stated that *… I would say it would usually be during the course of a normal conversation*. In the second example, the participant declared that *… there is no particularly remarkable/dramatic coming-out experience at work.* Therefore, the communication disclosure strategy is the course of normal conversation. Another participant explained how she became accustomed to being straightforward about the reason she had relocated and so she had become accustomed *… to just blurting it out. Especially as people ask why I relocated to Cape Town (answer – relocated with my partner)*.

The fourth example also confirmed that there was no communication disclosure strategy, but it is slightly different to the latter, because, in this case, the participant herself referred to her partner as a woman, thereby, leaving no room for misinterpretation. *In my current firm, everyone is aware. It was never really a 'disclosure' either. It's just a fact of who I am. I never had a 'conversation' or 'coming out' with anyone with regards to my sexual orientation. I have always just referred to my partner as being female and have had no negative response*. In the final example, the participant also referred to her partner as her "girlfriend", thereby revealing upfront that she is gay. *I think I have been lucky because I work in a small community … and so everyone knows me and knows that I am gay. When I started working I had to tell them I was gay and so the way I did it was when I had to go to Australia to work I just said: 'can my girlfriend come for a little bit to visit?' So now everyone knows you and so now even if I go to a new company I don't have to go 'hi I am [Betty] and I am gay' because they know*.

In the preceding example, disclosure was revealed as being part of everyday conversation. However, by pre-empting that some people may not accept someone as being gay, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.2), this participant did show a certain level of cognitive complexity linked to social constructivism. It confirms that cognitively complex individuals tend to have a better perception of subtle differences and nuances in interaction behaviour. As argued in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.2) by authors such as Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:72) and Wood (2004:153–154), cognitive complexity is based on the complexity of individuals' interpretative processes and this complexity is based on how sophisticated an individual is in terms of differentiation, abstraction and organisation. The participant said, *It came up in conversation. It's not a secret that I'm sharing. It came out in conversation and maybe some of them don't agree, maybe some of them don't accept it but they don't discriminate against me to my face. So, I don't get treated differently than any other colleague because I'm gay*.

The final sub-theme that was extrapolated from this theme involves gay individuals explaining that people really just figured "it" ("it" referring to him/her being gay) out, or pieced it together, based on conversations and or experiences with the participants. This is supported by the following three quotations from participants:

- *They figured it out and when I was asked, I told them that yes, I am gay.*
- *The majority of my colleagues figured it out for themselves before I told them that I was gay.*
- *I didn't exactly tell this person that I was gay; they seemed to figure it out on their own when bumping into myself and my partner at Church. Well later during the week at work it came out that I was gay and all seemed to be fine*.

6.2.3 Externally controlled disclosure

Externally controlled disclosure occurs when the locus of control of disclosure is outside of the control of the gay individual, because the disclosure is externally controlled by someone else, such as a colleague disclosing the gay individual's sexual identity.

6.2.3.1 "Outed" by others

This theme emerged, based on sub-themes of participants expressing that their sexual identity was revealed by others, or their sexual identity was revealed accidentally. For example, gay individuals could be intentionally or unintentionally 'outed', if a colleague finds out that they are gay via a rumour, gossip or grapevine communication, and the

gay individual becomes aware of it. Another example occurs when a colleague is unaware that others are not aware that their colleague is gay and "outs" the gay individual to these colleagues or in front of colleagues that do not know the individual is gay. This type of communication disclosure relates to the conjectures in Chapter 3 (*section 3.4.2*) about grapevine communication in organisations. In this case, disclosure was disseminated via an unorganised, unofficial and informal organisational dialogue that did not follow the regular structures of organisational communication. Grapevine communication, which is often based on rumours, often spreads rapidly throughout the organisation (Alparslan & Kılınç 2015:115–116; Cacciattolo 2015:83; Enyia & Orokor 2016:37–38; Markovic & Salamzadeh 2018:22–23; Nwogbaga *et al* 2015; Robinson & Thelen 2018).

When a colleague unintentionally discloses to other colleagues that an individual is gay, it could be an intentional act, e.g. when a colleague is gossiping or spreading rumours. However, it may also be an unintentional disclosure. Even if unintentional, it can, at times, still be negative for the gay individual and/or insensitive towards him/her, because rumour or gossip still causes discomfort, as is demonstrated in the following narrative relayed by one of the participants regarding a workshop hosted by his organisation. *An interesting experience recently was a transformation workshop we had to attend. It was facilitated by a company that specialises in running transformation workshops for corporates. As part of the workshop, we were requested to each take a turn to explain who we were and where we place ourselves in a transformation discussion. Almost everyone spoke to their religion, marital status and children and associating with being Afrikaans, English, etc. This did make me feel quite uncomfortable as I felt obliged to disclose my relationship and sexuality in a group forum. I don't think the organisers really considered the effect of delving into people's relationships*. This explanation clearly demonstrates how organisations and/or those that are closely connected to them, such as the training provider in this case often lack sensitivity when designing group activities or exercises. The transformation workshop involved in this example was supposed to embrace sensitivity, but it did, in fact, the exact opposite. This is a caution to organisations that, when planning group interactions and activities, it should not be assumed that everyone aligns with the heteronormative examples utilised. Additionally, just because the organisational context is heteronormative, it should not be assumed that everyone within the context is heterosexual. This outcome is significant, in that it can

guide organisations towards best practice in dealing with diversity within the organisation.

When a colleague intentionally discloses to other colleagues that a colleague is gay, even in some cases starting a rumour, this type of grapevine communication can be considered hurtful and may have a negative influence for gay individuals about the organisational climate and/or culture that they work in as a gay individual. A number of participants did observe that they believed some colleagues had found out that they were gay via rumour. One of the participant's explanations summarised the rumour aspect of grapevine communication by annotating an example in his organisational context. He explained that he often worked outside the country and he found that, when he returned from a trip, someone in the office had told others about his sexual identity. He said, *I am not in the office a lot; I work in the field and travel a lot, so I am in and out and it happens frequently when I come back from a secondment that there are new people. Generally, they find out from other people and rumour. I make a point to be very open. In fact, people have said that I am too open*. Another participant explained that he told only one other colleague that he is gay and that specific colleague told others and that was how people found out via grapevine communication he is gay. – *I was asked by other colleagues and when asked I confirmed it and it just got around. Back when there weren't too many gay people out in the open it was quite an exciting thing for straight people to know a gay person. Can't imagine why … I didn't generally tell everybody. I would tell one or two people and then the grapevine would come in*. However, grapevine communication can have a negative impact for those involved and may lead to a decline in communication between colleagues. Some participants could not be certain how a colleague to whom they had not disclosed, found out that they are gay, but they assumed that it was through grapevine communication. At times, grapevine communication may have quite a negative impact for gay individuals, as it denies them the choice of deciding to whom they want to disclose to and the appropriate time to opt to disclose.

As indicated in the self-preservation communication strategies, some gay individuals choose not to tell some colleagues that they are gay, based on various reasons and this strategy of others finding out via the grapevine takes that choice away from gay individuals. This participant said, *I think it was through the grapevine but I have no confirmation of this but apparently she did know and she didn't like it but never told me really but she would make comments around it*.

In some instances, the rumour or gossip that ensues post-disclosure makes participants feel uncomfortable. One of the participants explained that *… the majority were gossiping behind my back and that is how it got spread around. It was very uncomfortable in the workplace with that*. Grapevine communication can have negative consequences, particularly when they are used as a rumour mill. It also resonates with the individual experience of discrimination in the organisation and how each individual perceives the interpretation and discrimination of his/her disclosure of sexual identity and his/her colleagues' subsequent reactions, based on his/her unique experience. Discrimination in the organisation does not always occur as a formal type of discrimination; it can be informal and occur within social settings in the organisation. Employees will interpret their experiences in the organisational context and they will assess the messages that they receive overtly and subtly to gain an overall perception of their organisational climate and/or culture. Another participant expressed how she had not disclosed to a specific colleague and thought that this colleague came to know she is gay through the grapevine. She said, *… it's – ag – through the grapevine*. Moreover, this colleague then made derogatory comments in front of customers about gay people and warned the customer to be careful of the participant, because she is gay. – *The person found out and then, in front of customers, that person made comments and derogatory comments and said be careful - ah that sort of thing*. Even though the participant expressed that the colleague did this in a joking way, it was a negative experience for the gay individual, as it is a form of bigotry. It forced the gay individual to disclose and placed him/her in a highly uncomfortable situation.

It can be concluded that the "outed" by others communication that leads to disclosure is often not a positive experience for gay individuals. Gossip and rumour are negative forms of organisational communication, thereby confirming the theoretical discussion by authors such as Alparslan and Kılınç (2015:115–116), Cacciattolo (2015:83), Enyia and Orokor (2016:37–38), Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018:22–23), Nwogbaga *et al* (2015), and Robinson and Thelen (2018) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4.2), that they can create a non-cooperative environment that has the potential to foster a negative organisational climate and/or culture. Organisations should consider tactics to stop this form of communication. It starts with managers and leaders within the organisation ensuring that they themselves do not engage in this form of communication and take a firm stance when they hear this sort of communication. Gossip should be discouraged in teams and individual team leaders should encourage employees not to become involved in this type

of communication. Those who gossip and or spread rumours should be called out for this and organisations may even look at including aspects in their ethics policies. However, it should be noted that, regardless of the measures taken, informal communication is not easily controlled within an organisational context.

6.2.3.2 Direct questioning

The theme of direct questioning includes elements of gay individuals being pushed to disclose their sexual identity by others directly asking them questions about their sexual identity, partner or personal life by a colleague. Although the gay individual may decide not to answer the question if they disclose, the disclosure is prompted by external people asking questions. This theme includes sub-themes of participants only disclosing their sexual identity if a colleague directly questions them about it. Many participants did express that, although they will not simply come out and tell people that they are gay, if someone does ask them, they will disclose their sexual identity. One participant said, *If it happens that people ask me about my sexuality I answer them honestly by saying that I am gay. I will not deny who I am*.

Some participants felt that their professional and private lives were separate and, therefore, they had no desire to disclose their sexual identity. This information is part of their personal lives and, unless they are asked, they do not disclose. This links to professional communication, where it was posited that it is advisable to consider and limit the personal information shared between co-workers, because it may cause work-related issues. One of the participants expressed this, but added a bit of humour (which is discussed later in this section), *… when it came to work, I tried keeping my private life separate and use the, 'if they ask I will tell' rule but this didn't work for very long, as I love to have DMCs, have fun and make genuine friends*. She jokingly said that she loved deep and meaningful conversations (DMCs), but this did have an important element within the humour and that is that individuals have an innate need to interact with others. This is also an important aspect of organisational communication – that interpersonal engagements and communication are encouraged within the organisational context.

In a professional context in particular, it can be assumed that individuals are more cautious to probe into personal matters of colleagues and, in many cases, would probably not directly question or ask a colleague if s/he is gay, but rather try to coax it out of the colleague if s/he wants to know. One of the participants confirmed this

assumption by saying that *… I have only had a small number of people ask me outright and none of those experiences had been negative*.

Another participant explained that some colleagues just stated that they were gay. For the most part, the reaction to the disclosure was positive and, even if there was anxiety for the gay individual, in the moment of being questioned, the outcome of the disclosure changed the anxiety to a sense of relief. *… Some people were to the point and asked, which I answered 'yes' and their reaction would be best described as happy, with 'Why have you never told me*?' On the other hand, one of the participants expressed how she had a negative first experience of disclosure and, for that reason, had decided to disclose only if she was directly asked. However, she also expressed that she would not hide the fact that she is gay *… after my first experience I decided that I would still not just come out with "it"* ["it" referring to being gay] *but not hide it either, let me explain. My partner drops me at work and picks me up in the afternoon and I talk about her all the time. If anybody asks, I tell them that I am gay and if they have any questions that they want to ask then I will be to happy answer*.

The final quotation used in this section directly aligns with Mead's (1939) work on the conversation of gestures, as discussed in symbolic interactionism in Chapter 2 (*section 2.2.3.3*). Similar to Mead, this participant, used a dog as an analogy when he said, *Once you start speaking to someone, you can already suss out what is their feeling towards other people. It's the same as meeting a dog for the first time – you can suss out is this dog gonna bite me or not – and it's the same with people and you can immediately know can I say something or can't I say something. 'Cos just now you read them wrong, and you say something and you have a negative experience. So obviously, you also – you have to be comfortable with the person before just blurting it out. That's why I say I – don't blurt it out until they outright ask me or if they find out in conversation*. This quotation supports the theoretical construct of cognitive complexity – specifically the abstract dimension. The participant analysed a colleague in terms of his/her internal motives, personality traits and character, based on the gay individual's own perceptions and interpretations. As established in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.2.2), abstractness is not necessarily related to accuracy and is open to an individual's own perceptions, which aligns with a perception study read from an interpretivist paradigm, which is focused on individuals' perceptions and unique experiences.

Moreover, as indicated in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3.3), in Mead's (1934) research conducted on the mind, he uses an analogy of a dogfight to illustrate the point of the conversation of gestures. When two dogs get ready to fight, Mead (1934:47) explains, they snap and growl at each other, waiting to attack. This snapping and growling are gestures for attack. The gestures of one dog snapping or growling cause the other dog to change its position, based on the gesture. These gestures are not significant, because there is no conscious behaviour taking place; the dogs are merely reacting to a stimulus. For Mead (1934:42–50), the key to the conversation of gestures is unconscious communication. Hence, in this example the colleague did not know that they were unconsciously communicating to the gay individual about whether or not he could disclose. In this case, the gay individual would only do so, if asked directly. If a participant perceives a colleague incorrectly, s/he may have a negative disclosure experience … *just now you read them wrong, and you say something and you have a negative experience. So obviously, you also – you have to be comfortable with the person before just blurting it out*. This is important in alignment with Mead's conversation of gestures, because, when an individual, in this case the participant and/or his colleague, comprehends his gestures and understands their meaning, then these gestures become significant. In this case, the participant was showing concern that, if he misinterpreted the meaning of a colleague's gestures, he might have a negative disclosure experience. The opposite may also be argued. – Should gay individuals' interpret the meaning of a particular gesture correctly, s/he could use this gesture as a significant symbol in the future when determining if s/he should disclose his/her sexual identity.

The following two sections examine the perceptions of participants of both positive and negative ways in which their interaction behaviour has been influenced and/or altered by the reality-altering event of disclosure in the organisational context. At the core of the aim of these two sections is theoretical insights for the actual re-communication in the proposed re-communication conceptual framework. Re-communication is based on participants' perceptions of how the reality-altering event has altered their interaction behaviour with colleagues, once they have disclosed their sexual identity as being gay. The perceived alteration in interaction behaviour, irrespective of how small, also results in an alteration in the co-constructed social reality participants have with a colleague and this change is examined.

6.3 Findings on re-communication

When analysing the data on the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour, a pattern emerged in post-disclosure behaviour. The influence was either positive, leading to more open and spontaneous communication, or negative, resulting in less meaningful and more constrained communication. Therefore, this section is separated into two parts. Firstly, those themes that were perceived as positive re-communication and secondly, those themes that were perceived as negative re-communication.

In the section that follows, positive re-communication is evident from the analysis/findings of the interviews and narratives and will be discussed as follows:

- *Spontaneous communication* – Elements of gay individuals perceiving that their disclosure led to improved and/or more open communication with colleagues. Thus, altering from strategic communication having to measure and consider everything being said to more spontaneous and open communication, where the gay individuals share more in-depth and personal information and have more meaningful relationships with the colleagues to whom they have disclosed.
- *Positive emotions* – Elements where gay individuals' experience any positive emotions linked to the disclosure of their sexual identity as gay.
- *Increased understanding of gay individuals* – Elements when gay individuals' disclosure has led to a colleagues improved understanding or acceptance of gay individuals because of their interaction with these colleagues that are gay.
- *Neutrality* – Elements where gay individuals perceived no change or a neutral response to interaction behaviour after disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues. This is categorised as positive, because these colleagues have remained consistent when gay individuals perceived that they may have been judged, but they demonstrated that is not the case.
- *Positively influencing telling others* – When gay individuals refer to positive experiences of disclosure positively influencing their willingness to disclose to others.

6.3.1 Findings on positive re-communication

Figure 6.2 presents the perceptions of participants of how disclosure has positively altered their interaction behaviour with colleagues, once they have disclosed their sexual identity as gay to them.

Figure 6.2: Positive re-communication

6.3.1.1 Spontaneous communication

The findings identified several positive aspects in participants' disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues. In these instances, disclosure seems to influence the interaction behaviour from strategic communication, when participants are still deciding if or how they will disclose their sexual identity, to spontaneous communication. In the self-preservation communication stage and even in some of the disclosures, the communication is more purposeful and planned and always considered. This is in contrast to spontaneous communication after disclosure, which is more expressive and requires no prompts or forced interactions. Spontaneous communication aligns with what some participants articulated feeling post-disclosure, in that they can be more

"themselves". One participant said *… once my work colleagues found out, I had a better relationship with them. It was a more honest relationship and I could be myself*. From the responses of some of the participants, it was evident that they felt more positive and encouraged about disclosing their sexual identity post-disclosure. One of the participants expounded that *… from that point on, I decided that I did not need to hide from my peers*. This is a positive expression, because hiding and being secretive has a connotation of being ashamed of something or wanting not to reveal something. Therefore, the participant no longer feeling the need to hide her sexual identity is a turning point, which is noted in the words from that point on, which is a statement of altering towards disclosing her sexual identity to colleagues.

The theme of not hiding and feeling freer to be more open comes up again. In this case, it is an example of disclosure resulting in the participant's perceptions of a colleague who is not judgemental and, thereby, creating a positive feeling for the participants of a "safe space" to disclose; one in which they can trust a colleague. Some participants felt it led to open communication. For example, one participant said *… by telling people and not receiving a negative response meant that I could continue to disclose this personal information, which allows me to be more free, not feel like I am hiding. We get on even better now*. In their responses, several participants described how they now had improved and/or more meaningful relationships – and even friendships – with colleagues post-disclosure, saying *… our work relationship has grown into a beautiful friendship since then.*

Another positive aspect of spontaneous communication is the comfort that disclosure brings to the participants, in that they no longer feel the need to avoid disclosure or to conceal their sexual identity. *I think [disclosure] really does influence because you know that you can be comfortable enough to be yourself and you don't have to live a lie -like I said - if they have issues, they have an issue, but the work still has to be done, but I've never had it, that it – that anyone discriminated against me because of it so I think it makes it more easy to talk about it to other new colleagues or colleagues that you deal with once in a while to disclose to them – because it's – nothing really changes*. Trust is an important aspect about all interpersonal relationships and it is critical for collaborative and cooperative work relationships. As posited in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4), collaboration and cooperation are considered essential attributes for high-performing work environments and for conducive team engagements.

Therefore, when participants expressed that the disclosure of their sexual identity led to more trusting relationships, this is considered beneficial and positive within the organisational context. Many of the participants observed a more open communication post-disclosure between themselves and their colleagues and that the relationships were more meaningful, as was the communication because of openness, honesty and trust. As indicated by Moeng (2010), Pate *et al* (2009:319–325), Puusa and Tolvanen (2006) in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.5), this is critical, because trust leads to increased information sharing, better team cooperation, cooperative relationships, increased productivity and greater involvement in the organisational context. All these aspects lead to employees who are more loyal. One of the participants asserted that *… I must say the relationship changed in a more trusting relationship and – ja* [Afrikaans word for "yes"] *– just communication is very easy between us, we can talk about anything*. As established in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.1), open communication contributes to more positive organisational climates and/or cultures.

The following example is also linked to trust, although with a slightly different trajectory. In this example, the participant explained how the fact that she disclosed to a colleague made the colleague feel that the participant trusted him/her enough to share the truth about her sexual identity. This shared trust resulted in a closer and more open relationship. Trust is an important part of cooperative relationships. The participant said the following: *You build a relationship and you start talking more and eventually it comes out okay, yes, I am gay, you not and – the only thing that would change is – you - you would – your conversations would become more personal, like they will ask, you now, where previously they wouldn't have asked you anything about your private life, now they get to ask you okay 'how's your wife, how's your kid?' – Whereas before they wouldn't have. But also, because they know you and you don't know them, so – once you've disclosed, it's again like that this gay individual trusted you to share the secret so it feels like the relationship then becomes closer and more personal and, the conversations as well - like they'll ask you more about your personal life, how's your partner, some will ask you straight out how is it to be gay*. This quotation is significant, because the participant specifically referred to the disclosure, making the relationship more personal. However, there is another important element involved in this example – that of a reciprocal trust relationship. The participant explained that this colleague now felt that she had trusted him/her, which resulted in a closer relationship and more in-depth conversations.

Many participants explained how they found it much easier to have a conversation with a colleague post-disclosure. One example reflected the following sentiment: *It is much easier to have conversations with people after disclosure*. Similar to more open communication after disclosure, some participants commented on how they that felt they could also share experiences with these colleagues, such as about their weekend or their partner. Although it may be argued that these types of personal conversations are not work-related, it is prudent that employees should still feel connected to one another. These type of encounters seem to illicit feelings of belonging among participants and their colleagues. One participant said *… for me it has [referring to disclosure] always kind of been a positive experience, I've had very few bad ones and it's always been more open and you can now joke together about what you did the weekend and you can talk about everything and share experiences with me.* Another participant said *… it feels like the relationships then becomes closer and more personal and the conversations as well*.

Both the following two quotations demonstrate something interesting about the alteration in communication post-disclosure. The participants, who mentioned that the communication post-disclosure was more spontaneous and open, both added another element and that is that their male colleagues now treated them as "one of the guys". The participants did not experience this negatively; in fact, they actually enjoyed the camaraderie. However, it may be argued that this is also a form of masculinisation of these women colleagues. One participant said, *Once my work colleagues found out, I had a better relationship with them. It was a more honest relationship and I could be myself. My male colleagues would invite me to pubs and we would 'spot the talent' together over a few pints. Mind you, my 'homophobic' brothers turned out to be great 'wingmen' too. My female colleagues would ask a load of questions but accepted me and some are still my friends today*. The participant stated that her relationships improved, once colleagues had found out that she was gay. In this narrative, it is evident that the communication between the participant and her colleagues had become more spontaneous after disclosure.

The curiosity discussed earlier around colleagues asking gay individuals numerous enquiring questions, once they have found out that the individual is gay, once again comes to the fore and it possibly involves again the colleagues trying to test if their own socially constructed assumptions about gay individuals hold true. This is in alignment with the conjectures of socially constructed realities discussed in Chapter 2. This

quotation is primarily positioned under this element because of the way in which the participant described how her male counterparts made her "one of the guys". This theme of masculinisation is followed through in the second quotation, although in this quotation, the participant is taking ownership for her role in masculinisation by a male colleague. She said, now that he knew she is gay, *… I feel like we speak more about being in a relationship with a woman and we stereotype them but still we talk about it*. This participant did disclose in the interview that she had previously had bad experiences of colleagues masculinising her. Therefore, the researcher asked a follow-up question about how her colleagues were doing what the other male colleagues did, but in a positive way. The researcher probed about what made it different and turned it into a bonding experience. The participant explained that *… in a way I think that was more I don't want to say aggressive but basically aggressive and definitely like aaahhh with [Paul] it is more playful and we both know that we still respect the people that we are with but we can have a joke about them in a sense*." The researcher asked if this had bonded them and the participant responded *… Yes we have bonded. So I say, how is your chikita and he says cool and he says how is your chickadee and we relate stories like I say I got flowers and she wasn't happy with the flowers I got and then I say I don't even get [Jean] flowers anymore because the cats eat them*. It is interesting to note that part of this bonding is that they have actually made up their own personal language by using the word "Chiquita". Later, she explained that he referred to her girlfriends as "Chickadee". Creating words with shared meaning only bonds them; it also cements a shared meaning only understood by them and, in this way, it actually strengthens their relationship.

This importance of language and meaning again highlights the significance of choosing symbolic interactionism as the theoretical foundation, as it closely aligns with the aim of this study. It is through this act of disclosure that the co-constructed social reality the participants share with colleagues alters, as well as the interaction behaviour with each colleague to whom they disclose their sexual identity. Although this participant previously had negative experiences with being masculinised, in this example, masculinisation has actually created a positive and collaborative work friendship that has positively influenced this participant. This negates some of the previously raised concerns about masculinisation, but only if it is done cooperatively and with dual participation between the gay individual and his/her colleagues.

Another example related to the formation of a meaningful relationship out of the spontaneity in communication that disclosure brings, is demonstrated by the following participant, who said, *… both [Jabu] and [Michele] knew of my sexual orientation and would rather show me a beautiful woman in a respectful but playful manner. They both taught me many things and not one day judged me or made me feel uncomfortable*. This example uses humour and playfulness around knowing their colleague is gay. When used to create a defensive culture, humour is a sub-section of negative re-communication, but in this case, it is used supportively. As established in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4) and supported by authors such as Cooke and Szumal (2004:148), supportive and constructive organisational climates and/or cultures – as opposed to defensive and aggressive cultures – are considered to lead to healthier work environments in which communication flows more freely and employees generally feel more positive about work.

Although alluded to in the previous example, the formation of a meaningful relationship was one of the positive outcomes of disclosure for some participants. In the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure discussed in Chapter 5, meaningful relationships were discussed as influencing or motivating disclosure, although it appeared as if the participant was friends with the colleagues during the self-preservation communication stage. Positive re-communication occurs when disclosure results in more spontaneous communication, which, in turn, leads to meaningful relationships between participants and their colleagues to whom they have disclosed. This example demonstrates this where the participant claimed that *… because this person did not view me as gay but rather as just a 'normal' person I was very comfortable due to their lack of judgement over the fact that I was gay. Communication increased in the office between us and we ended up becoming friends outside of work. We have long not worked together, but remain in contact*.

Two of the participants explained that colleagues seemed to ask more questions after disclosure and, in their view, disclosure often turned into an enquiry. For example, one participant said "*… the conversation would change into enquiry: 'How long have you been together? How did you know you were gay? How did it start? How did the relationship start? Did you always know you were gay? Have you ever been straight*? A second participant explained that *I had a colleague that I was working with and spoke to on the odd occasion. After she came aware that I am gay, she had a lot of questions*,

which I had no problem in answering. Since then our relationship has grown from just being colleagues speaking once in a while to becoming best friends at the workplace. She is now working for another company but we stay in constant contact with each other. It may be argued that perceptions of gayness may be socially constructed in a particular social and cultural context and the questions colleagues ask could be a way of testing the accuracy or their constructs of gayness and, possibly, curiosity. This is in direct alignment with the theoretical constructs of social constructionism, as highlighted in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.1), where meaning and reality are individually constructed and reality is a social construct that is co-constructed by the individuals creating the stories of their lives and participating in it. It is their perceptions of what makes up their co-constructed social reality.

The meaning that is derived from these day-to-day activities arises from the interactive human community in which individuals engage and language is used as a communication tool during interaction. The resultant post-disclosure behaviour would be determined by the social reality people ascribe to a given phenomenon. Therefore, perceptions of gayness are socially constructed and understood by each individual, based on his/her perceptions and these perceptions are partly developed during interaction exchanges by using language as a communication tool. Moreover, this also aligns with symbolic interactionists' views on social interaction at the micro level of social life, as explicated in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.6) by authors such as Collis and Hussey (2003:53), Du Plooy-Cilliers (2010:40–41), Halas (2012:3) and Mead (1934:267–269). The focus of symbolic interactionism is the way in which individual social encounters function and influence individuals, rather than looking at socio-cultural and socio-political ideological aspects at a macro societal level. However, in this case, it is at the macro societal level that colleagues would develop their socially constructed views on gayness, which, in turn influence their perception of gay individuals whom they may encounter in the organisational context.

6.3.1.2 Positive emotions

This theme includes elements where participants experience any positive emotions linked to the disclosure of their sexual identity as gay. When participants' disclosure results in them perceiving the disclosure as leading to a healthier state of existence in the organisational context, post-disclosure would be included in this sub-theme. One of the participant's narratives clearly described this healthier state of mind: *I am now very*

open about my sexual orientation, but I have not always been. I can try to explain how being open about it has helped and been much healthier for me than keeping it to myself.

There was also evidence of participants feeling that they can be their more authentic and true selves after disclosure. One participant explained that, *… it was great to just be myself, and have people know*." In other cases, the participants perceived that their colleagues felt more positive towards them post-disclosure *… I think it's more – the difference comes more the way they communicate with you…* This example indicates that the gay individual noticed a difference in the way that her colleagues communicated with her post-disclosure and this brought about positive feelings. Disclosure not only affords participants a sense of happiness or positivity, as in the previous examples, but an even stronger emotion – that of relief – once their colleagues know their sexual identity is gay. *After spending time trying to avoid or skirt around the issue and using the personal pronoun game and minding my Ps and Qs it is often such a relief to come out and tell someone*. These findings seem to have a link to the field of Psychology. – The emotion between disclosure and a healthier state of mind is a psychological consideration and, given that this is a communication study, it does not fall within the scope of the study. It may be considered exploring in future studies.

6.3.1.3 Increased understanding of gay individuals

This theme occurs when colleagues attempt to find common ground or show their understanding or support of participants by referring to other gay individuals whom they have encountered in their lives. This seems to be a strategy that participants' colleagues use to communicate acceptance of the gay individual. This strategy aligns with a message at the relational level from a symbolic interactionism perspective, as covered in Chapter 2, and, as indicated in Chapter 3, it was considered by the HSRC 2015 survey on attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa that "In numerous studies it has been shown that what most effectively shifts people's negative perceptions of homosexual people is increased contact, especially with family members and friends" (Sutherland *et al* 2016:41). For example, one participant said *… another colleague's positive response was telling me all about her gay cousin then inviting us to her family farm and a braai [South African word for a barbeque] at her place with her husband and family*. At times, participants explained that a colleague expressed how the participant had made them see gay individuals' in a different way, almost as if a role model: *You have made me see gay people in a different way and made me understand that your relationships are actually as loyal and committed as any other couple and I do*

feel that I have changed my previous negative position on gay people being promiscuous. Another example is when the colleague tried to find common ground and shared meaning by referring to someone well known, who is gay, and making an association with the participant. One of the participants explained that they gave … *stories of other people that they know who are gay, exciting news of other gay couples (marriages/children) and how awesome Ellen DeGeneres is*?

6.3.1.4 Neutrality

Some of the participants did not perceive any alteration between themselves and their colleagues after disclosure. Things remained neutral and this was considered positive re-communication that the gay individuals did regard as having impacted on an existing relationship. Some comments to evidence this are:

- *Nothing has changed. More recently, at [X institution] it's been the first time that I've been more open towards my students about this. I've no idea how they talk about this amongst themselves, of course, but certainly their first reactions were entirely neutral. 'Non-reactions', as it were.*
- *From that day on, it was okay and she never changed towards me*.

Although there were not many of these comments, it is argued that, even if there was no palpable change in behaviour, the gay individual and the colleague have altered their co-constructed social reality from a position of the colleague not knowing the participant is gay to one in which s/he does know. This may be demonstrated by the gay individual referring his/her partner by name, whereas before disclosure, s/he would have used personal pronouns to avoid referring to his/her partner. Some of the participants remarked that nothing had changed. In fact, they took it a step further by expressing that some colleagues actually could not understand why the participant did not tell them. Throughout the sub-theme, there is evidence that the disclosure and subsequent interaction behaviour surrounding the disclosure may be a major event in the participants' lives and they explained it in vivid detail. On the other hand, some evidence shows the colleague often experiencing it as a non-event. For example, one participant said, *I must say that some of the people I have told it's like I don't understand why you didn't tell me earlier. I get that a lot*.

6.3.1.5 Positively influencing telling others

This theme has elements of participants referring to how positive experiences of disclosure positively influenced their willingness to disclose to others. One participant said *… by telling people and not receiving a negative response meant that I could continue to disclose this personal information.* For many participants, disclosing their sexual identity as gay had not been a negative experience *… for the most part I cannot say that coming out at work was a negative experience, perhaps because I simply started to expect that people should take it in [their] stride*.

At times, this positive experience in disclosure influenced the participant's future disclosure even when, for example, moving to another organisation. One participant said: *It has made me more open and more willing to blurt it out and I am more direct when asked*. Another element raised is a perception that younger gay individuals seemed to find it easier to disclose *… I have noticed that the younger people are more open to it; actually, much more open. Almost like you say it and it is like 'ah okay' almost no change.* This may be because, as time moved on, their appeared to be less stigma attached to disclosure.

In conclusion, it is argued that the participants' experiences of disclosing influence their perceptions of whether it is or is not a good idea to disclose this information. These perceptions, in turn, influence the social construction of their own social reality in terms of the risks associated with disclosing their sexual identity to a given colleague. However, even with this in mind, the disclosure does result in negative re-communication at times.

6.3.2 Findings on negative re-communication

Figure 6.3 presents the perceptions of participants of the way in which disclosure has altered their interaction behaviour with colleagues in a less meaningful way, once they have disclosed their sexual identity as gay.

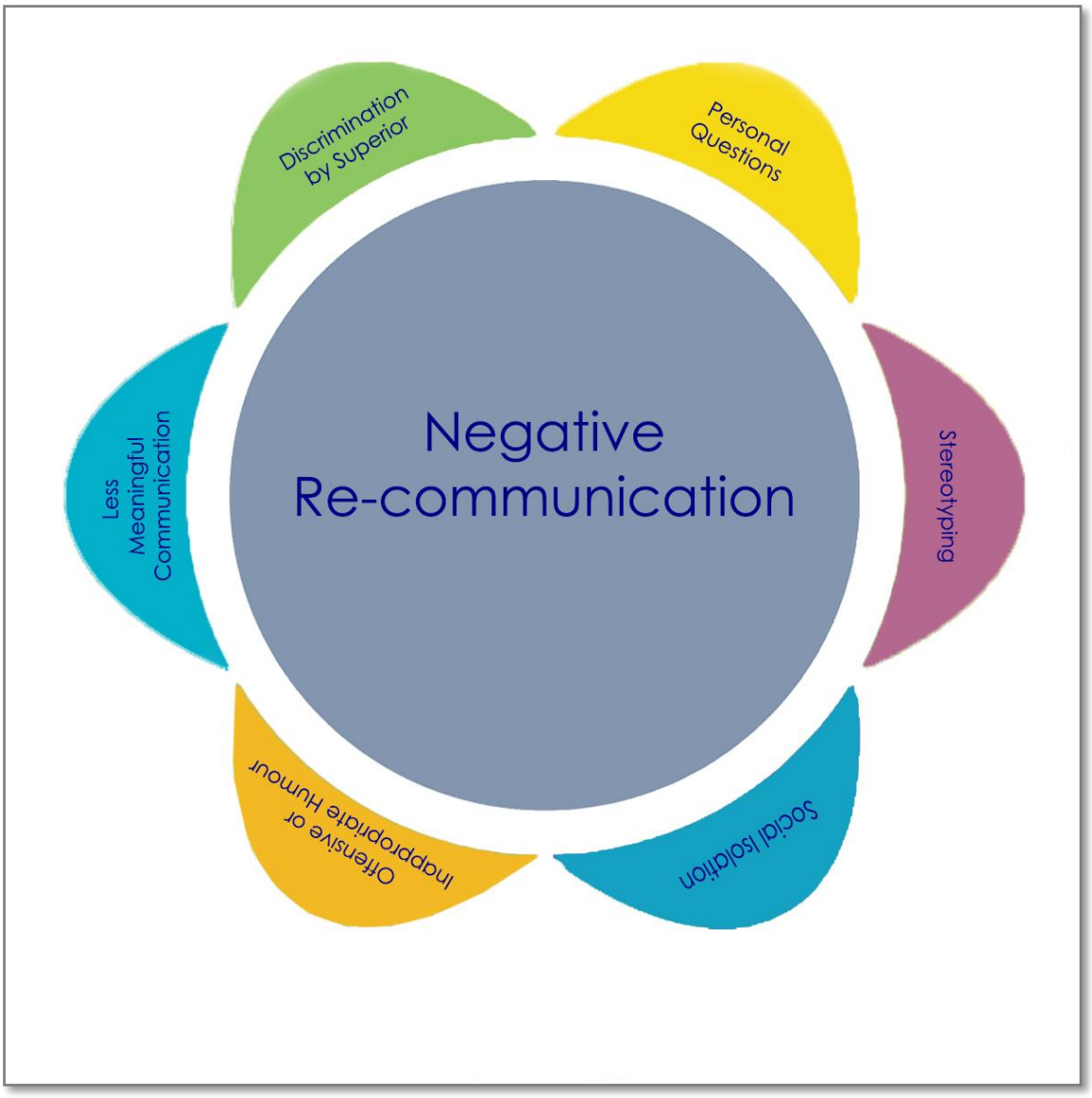


Figure 6.3: Negative re-communication

In this section, negative re-communication is evident from the analysis/findings of the interviews and narratives and will be discussed as follows:

- *Discrimination by superior* – Elements where gay individuals' have had negative disclosure encounters with a senior staff member in the organisational context, which has negatively altered their interaction behaviour with their superior.
- *Personal questions* – Elements where communication post-disclosure is linked to any questions that are of a personal nature or have a sexual or derogatory overture. It also includes discussions on what the gay individual deems as inappropriate to engage in with colleagues.

- *Social isolation* – Elements where gay individuals may perceive that they have been excluded from post-disclosure such as social exclusion. This exclusion may be for a limited or more extended period.
- *Less meaningful communication* – Includes elements that demonstrate how gay individuals' disclosure of their sexual identity has led to less meaningful communication with a colleague.
- *Stereotyping* – When communication after gay individuals have disclosed their sexual identity includes stereotyping of gay individuals, based on socially constructed views of what it means to be gay.
- *Offensive or inappropriate humour* – This theme has three parts: (i) gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity using offensive or inappropriate humour; (ii) a colleague making jokes about gay individuals, resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity; (iii) the post-disclosure communication between gay individuals and a colleague includes continual jokes or mockery related to gay individuals.

6.3.2.1 Discrimination by a superior

This theme includes elements where participants have had negative disclosure encounters with a senior staff member or a superior, or they have been humiliated by a senior member in the organisational context. The encounter has negatively altered their interaction behaviour with their direct line manager or another senior member of the organisation. As indicated in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.3.1), an organisational climate and/or culture is influenced by leaders, because they not only contribute to whether an organisational climate and/or culture is well-adjusted and positive; they are also accountable for communicating and promoting the values and ethos of the organisation to employees. This, in turn, influences organisational behaviour and attitudes. A person in a position of authority, who misuses this power or uses it with negative impact, influences the organisational climate and/or culture, as well as the perception of leadership in general. It may also affect an individual's performance (his/her manager assesses him/her).

There were four specific examples mentioned of managers making inappropriate comments towards participants. These comments include a senior person's behaviour fraught with intimidation, harassment, threats and inappropriate comments, thereby making the participants uncomfortable and causing anxiety and upset. This type of bullying and intimidation may lead to organisational reputational damage and, if

managers are perpetuating such behaviour, it may lead to a poor organisational climate and/or culture in which discrimination is tolerated, and, as discussed in Chapter 3, this would be considered a disruptive organisational culture. Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter 3 "… when the interaction between the leadership and employees is good, the latter will make a greater contribution to team communication and collaboration, and will also be encouraged to accomplish the mission and objectives assigned by the organization, thereby enhancing job satisfaction" (Tsai 2011).

In the first example, the participant's manager showed a poor management style by not managing an employee on her output by using a performance process, but by bringing his personal presumptions into account. The participant explained that *… my team manager [be]came aware of me [being] gay and from then whenever I was either behind with my work or did not make target then he would always refer to my relationship or my partner as the reason for this. Where other co-workers would be asked just to try their best to get their work up to date he would always state, that in his opinion, my partner is not doing enough from her side at home and helping out with our child, so that I can spend more time focusing on my work and putting in more hours to get ahead*.

In the second instance, a senior employer harassed the participant at a work-related social event, when he found out the participant was gay. This senior clearly showed aggressive and bigamous behaviour to the participant. *He [be]came aware of the fact that I am gay when he overheard it in a conversation. We were at a Christmas party and a fellow employee, who was in a more senior position than myself, told me I was 'butch'. I took great offence to this and retaliated by pushing him away from me. He grabbed my arms and said "if you act like a boy I will treat you like a boy*. This specific example is concerning, as it relates to a threatening tone, but also has a very strong undertone of socially constructed stereotypes of what it means to be a man and a woman. "Treating her like a boy" could simply refer to acting aggressively towards her, the way men sometimes do towards each other. The crux of individuals' social encounters is based on meaning. The meaning that an individual ascribes to a given event, setting or situation would socially construct his/her social reality and would influence the way in which s/he will act, based on the way s/he interprets this social reality. This does not mean that the macro environment is not applicable; in fact, it is considered a limitation of symbolic interactionism. Hence, a socially constructed stereotype would fall within the ambit of the

macro environment and the way in which social norms and stereotypes exist, based on social reality.

The third instance is a clear indication of a senior employee showing bigamous behaviour towards the participant and publicly humiliating him. The fact that this is a senior member of the organisation gives gravitas to what he is saying and this disempowers the participant further. *… I walked past these bunch of boys, all of them were my seniors and this managing partner said out loud 'stand against the wall [John] is coming' and he pushed his back up against the wall. I responded and said: 'I am gay, I am not desperate'. The positive that came out of this was that one of the other partners came to me later and in the open plan office apologised on behalf of the other partners and said it was out of line. It stayed the same – he treated everyone like that*. The researcher asked if this manager made jokes about him being gay again, at which he responded *… once or twice he made jokes again about me being gay and I actually didn't care because of who he was. He did do that with others about things they are*. Although the participant considered it positive that one of the senior partners approached him later to say s/he did not agree with the treatment, this should have been done publicly, as was the humiliation of the gay individual. Doing it in private, the behaviour that was meted out by the superior may still be perceived as acceptable behaviour, given that the senior employee was not held accountable.

Lastly, inappropriate comments were made when a senior employee did not like the participant, because he was gay – not for work related reasons – *There was this guy at work and he was typical old school boys' club kind of guy, he was also a more senior person than me. I knew he did not like me, I thought it was because of personal reasons …* While this was a negative experience for the gay individual, he also stereotyped the senior employee by saying that he is a "typical old school boys club" type of man. The stereotype involved an old boys network often associated with those who attended elite private boys' schools and live elitist lives, utilising their old school connections and their families.

6.3.2.2 Personal questions

When a colleague asks participants' personal questions linked to sexual overtures post-disclosure of their sexual identity, it is not considered appropriate in a work context. A colleague generally would not speak about this to heterosexual colleagues. The next examples imply that the same boundaries are not considered when the colleague is gay.

As indicated in Chapter 3, it is important to ensure that organisational climates and/or cultures remain supportive and positive. The following examples show how unsupportive the asking of personal questions can be and the way in which it could negatively affect the organisational climate and/or culture for a gay individual. In more serious cases, it may lead to human resource management implications, such as disciplinary cases.

Some participants did express that colleagues would ask questions to find out more about gay people. One participant said, *… my female colleagues would ask a load of questions, but accepted me and some are still my friends today*. As previously discussed, this could be a form of curiosity and/or the colleagues' attempt to establish if their socially constructed views on gay individuals were accurate. An example that evidences this is *… the girls were more inquisitive. Especially because I was in a few long term, loving relationships. Sometimes I think they wanted what I had, in a male partner. They asked questions like, 'how did your parents take the news?' or 'do you want children and how would that work?' My female friends would console me when I went through a break-up and encourage me to stand tall because my partner is out there*.

However, some questions had a sexual overture and became inappropriate for conversations in the organisational context. Given their inappropriate nature, these types of questions being asked by one employee to another may lead to harassment and disciplinary issues within an organisation, but they may also cause a disruptive organisational climate and/or culture. The following are examples of questions of this nature:

- *When I was in Durban my direct boss, he knew before I started I was gay and we got to know each other and once we were on a flight together and he asked me what type of guys I was attracted to and then he would point at a guy and say that guy is very nice and do you think so?*
- *Who's the man?*
- *How do you know when you are 'finished' [referring to an orgasm]?*
- *Who is the boss?*
- *Have you had sex with a guy, because how do you know you would not like it?*

When one of the participants, who had experienced this type of direct questioning, was asked if she thought it was appropriate she said, *No; because I don't ask them [questions of a sexual nature] to straight people at work and that is the point*.

Another participant gave an example of how her colleagues ridiculed her about wanting to be a man. This type of commentary may result in the creation of a bullying organisational culture *... I mean they used to avoid me completely and like skinner* [a South African Afrikaans word meaning 'gossip']*. You can see they are in a skinner completely when they see me there and then they used to say things like: 'no wonder you work as a technician because you just want to be a man', and that is the one thing I suppose people have is that they…you know one of you has to be a man...and then you must cut your hair short, use wet gel and make it spiky*.

Another participant said, *Oh yeah! I was one of the guys when I was out with them, but also a 'challenge' for some of them. There was loads of flirting and wisecracks, from their part but alas... I prefer your girlfriend. There were also those 'hetero' guys who didn't know me from a bar of soap, who would challenge or try to belittle me. You know, the whole 'you just need a real man with big genitalia'. Thank G-d I have sharp comebacks and a sense of humour*. In some communities, there is a belief that if a woman has sexual relations with a heterosexual person, she would be "cured" of her homosexuality. It is a dated and derogatory narrative and this example illustrates that it is still problematic and being utilised against gay individuals.

The second example is less about derogatory banter and more about the attitude and/or behaviour occurring when a heterosexual person is around gay people in a context with a possibility of seeing each other naked, with the stereotypical view being that the gay person is trying to "make" the heterosexual person gay. However, it should be noted that there seems to be a non-verbal response perceived by the gay individual only; no words were actually spoken in this regard by the colleague. Therefore, most of this quotation is based on the participant's own concerns of colleague's prejudice: *I was at the urinal and he nearly caught himself in his zipper and all I could see was terror and panic on his face that I was there and near him in that position. I mean, I would go straight before I would go for him, but it was like he still thought I am gay and we are promiscuous so would be with any guy we could*. The perception of a gay individual trying to "turn" a heterosexual

person gay also confirms the findings of some of the literature in Chapter 3, as well as elements influencing non-disclosure discussed previously.

Besides the overt sexual comments, there were also examples of colleagues asking gay individuals' personal questions linked to things that are equated with a heterosexual relationship, such as marital status, marriage, children, *etc.* For example, one participant elaborated *… they always ask if my partner and I are married, and when I say 'no' they often want to know why we haven't gotten married*. Another example of a question about marriage involves a colleague actually imposing his/her views on marriage on the gay individual. For example, one participant noted *… I had a colleague four years ago who really pushed the topic that I must get married. I had to be quite adamant with her that it was not necessary for me to be married to improve my relationship of 18 years*. Other quotations also dealt with questioning participants about their views of having children. For example, one participant commented that *… they ask if we ever wanted to adopt kids. I suppose they try to relate my relationship to theirs*. It can be deduced that heterosexual colleagues may be trying to fit the relationship of gay colleagues into the heterosexual framework. This is in direct alignment to the work covered on symbolic interactionism and social construction of reality in Chapter 2 (*Section 2.2.1),* regarding the way in which certain symbols are socially constructed and have meaning for individuals, based on personal perceptions and social constructs – in this case, the heteronormative constructs of marriage, children, family, *etc.*

Although aspects related to religion have been raised in various sub-themes in the context of re-communication, it also surfaces in terms of negative re-communication in which a colleague uses religion as a way of trying to convince a participant that being gay is a sin. The following example illustrates this *… I had had some conversations with colleagues about faith, and God, and the fact that I do not believe in any God. The colleague I spoke with could not understand how this was possible. What did I do when things went bad? Also, at 30 years old, I often encountered questions about whether or not I was married, had a boyfriend, had children. These sorts of conversations led me to be a bit weary of disclosing information on my sexual orientation*.

6.3.2.3 Social isolation

Although meaningful relationships in the organisation are a predominant element motivating disclosure, it may also discourage disclosure. Some participants displayed a real concern for losing meaningful relationships if they disclose their sexual identity as

gay and indicated that they believed revealing their sexual identity to a colleague could put their friendship at risk. As such, the re-communication post-disclosure may lead to social isolation. In light of this, and as outlined in the social penetration theory in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2.3), a risk versus cost benefit assessment, would be conducted by the gay individual. The fear of loss that disclosure may bring, such as, the harm it could cause in a relationship or the possible influence it may have on being promoted, may also discourage disclosure of a person's sexual identity.

As an element that may influence disclosure, friendships are explained by one of the participants as a relatively new concern for gay individuals. In the past, concerns revolved around the potential loss of a gay individual's work or opportunities in the organisation. One of the gay individual's clarified it as follows: *It is strange how times have changed, 'cos that was something else that people that have had bad experiences in the past, they would almost fear their jobs being lost - And now people are more scared about losing friendships, so you know just a bit of a shift*. This quotation indicates that, in the past, gay individuals' greatest fear might have been that they would lose their jobs, if others found out about their sexual identity. However, there has been a shift in recent years and currently, gay individuals seem to be more concerned about losing friendships. Therefore, it can be deduced that there is a shift from a fear of job loss to the more contemporary fear of being excluded from social interactions.

Social aspects in the organisation are considered to play a significant role in contemporary organisations. The deductions are supported by the researcher's engagement with numerous studies in the writing up of Chapter 3. Earlier research – such as that of Ragins and Cornwell (2001), Valentine (1993), Croteau (1996) and Day and Schoenrade (1997) – points to a definite changing trend from discrimination, victimisation, fear and/or risk of job loss and difficulty "coming out" in the organisation to the current risk of disclosure being focused on social rejection, rather than job loss.

In the data analysis, it became apparent that social isolation and fear of losing meaningful relationships (as discussed previously) is expressed as a form of anxiety for participants. One of the gay individuals commented that *… the idea of coming out at work (like anywhere else) has always been a worrying one*. While the fear of gay individuals losing their jobs may not be a concern as great as it previously was, this quotation and other, similar ones illustrate that the fear of being rejected and socially isolated remains a factor

for discouraging disclosure. The examples also indicate that some gay individuals may still have fears from their own or other's previous experiences, even though times have changed.

6.3.2.4 Less meaningful communication

Based on participants' responses, it is argued that, when a colleague's response post-disclosure leads to negative re-communication, then the interaction behaviour between the participant and that colleague is less of a meaningful interaction. This is usually based on one or more of the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure, as discussed in Chapter 5. These elements include, but are not limited to, colleagues with conservative or narrow ideologies; and those whom the participants perceive as being derogatory, judgemental, prejudiced and/or discriminatory towards gay individuals. These elements have resulted in participants either continue using communication strategies to avoid disclosure, concealing their sexual identity, or delaying disclosure, all of which may limit truthful interaction behaviour.

Colleagues who were perceived as closed-minded and derogatory also seemed to hamper more meaningful communication. One participant explained that *… he always made derogatory jokes about gay people and when one day he found out I was gay our way of speaking was just not the same anymore*. Another participant said, *When someone is closed-minded I usually do not have as good communication or relationships with them especially if they know I am gay as I do with other colleagues who are open-minded*.

At times, disclosure resulted in uncomfortable interactions between participants and colleagues post-disclosure and this hampered any form of meaningful communication. Colleagues can make work life problematic for a gay individual. If a personal relationship is involved, the participants could walk away, but if they are working with someone, this may not be possible. They may not be in a current circumstance to walk away from a job, and/or they may not want to, and/or they may feel that they should not have to, based on others' prejudices. The following example supports this concept. The participant stated*… so, if you have a colleague that makes life difficult for you because you gay, unfortunately you are stuck together. But friends, I mean, if you been friends for long enough, your friends would know and – you choose your friends, you –don't - don't choose your colleagues*.

6.3.2.5 Stereotyping

The responses of participants demonstrate that there are times when colleagues generalise views about gay individuals, in this case the stereotyping of gay individuals. This aligns with the definition of stereotypes in the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2019) and indicated in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3), in that these generally prejudiced views are an oversimplification based on preconceived ideas about in this case gay individuals. The stereotypes that emerged in this theme were based on socially constructed views of what it means to be gay and how gay people are perceived to look and act. This socially constructed view of gay people directly links with the theory of social constructionism, as explored in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3) and as alluded to previously, while symbolic interactionism specifically looks at the micro societal level. This does not negate the macro level and within the macro environment, there are specifically socially constructed views of what it means to be gay and what denotes "gayness". The predominant stereotyping extrapolated from the data was linked to physical appearances when colleagues did or did not believe participants fitted the stereotypical and socially constructed views of what gay people present aesthetically.

In the first two examples, the participants perpetuated the socially constructed stereotype of how others perceive gay individuals and they themselves used the stereotype when referring to themselves. The first participant said, *… three quarters didn't believe me that I was gay; they thought I was joking because I do not stereotypically look gay*. The second participant stereotypes himself by saying *… I don't look like the stereotypical gay man. People, or I, often say they are going to revoke my gay card. I don't blow dry my hair and I dress crappy*. This perpetuates the stereotype of all gay men dressing well and being perfectly groomed.

An interesting point that came out in this theme, was how some of the participants actually stereotyped themselves by saying that they felt they physically looked gay and did not really understand why people did not guess their true sexual identity. The participant in the following example was actually perpetuating the stereotype, but she used it as both a self-preservation communication strategy and communication disclosure strategy, explaining that people should see from her physical appearance that she is gay *… I am not a person who introduce myself as 'Hi, I am [Jane] and I am gay… If people cannot see in my appearance that I am homosexual then I do not help them right by saying that I am gay just to set the record straight. I mean, a heterosexual person*

would not introduce themselves with their name, and their sexual orientation. I do not see how it would be appropriate. Get to know me as a person instead of judging me by who I prefer to have a family with. If it happens that people ask me about my sexuality, I answer them honestly by saying that I am gay. I will not deny who I am.

In juxtaposition, the following examples have colleagues stereotyping the participants … *I have actually been told here: 'why did you think I didn't know because you look gay*'. One of the gay women got the same comments, but she responded by using humour and an element of annoyance. She explained that "… *they say "ja"* [Afrikaans word for "yes"], *but you don't look gay* and then she responded … *I just say oh – I don't look like a lesbian dyke … and I make a joke about it*. One of the participants gave an example of a negative experience of this stereotyping when colleagues said … *be careful of that lesbian, because she's out to get us men*.

Based on the stereotypical butch/feminine dichotomy that has been socially constructed, gay women are often stereotyped as being butch. This stereotype is utilised to reference communication about the gay individual or if a participant is perceived as butch then she must be "one of the men". If she is feminine, then she does not fit the stereotype and, therefore she cannot be gay. Examples have been given that support this stereotyping. Because of its focus on aesthetics, the butch/feminine dichotomy relates to the stereotyping around dress sense. The following response is an example illustrating stereotyping by a colleague. One of the gay woman explained that … *I have been told a lot… 'do you not wear dresses because you feel more of the manly sort of gay person*?'

As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3), in the organisation, stereotypes may lead to the emergence of an organisational climate and/or culture rife with discrimination related to preconceived stereotypes of a particular group; in this case, gay individuals. This not only affects an individual's self-esteem, but may also lead to a limitation in workplace interactions and it may have a negative influence on productivity. It is also posited that stereotyping may lead to a non-inclusive and disruptive organisational climate and/or culture. As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4.3) and pointed out by Köllen (2016:1969–1973), gay men and women often face various stereotypes, discriminations and demotions in the organisation. Therefore, stereotyping may affect staff turnover, absenteeism, a belief that there are no promotional opportunities if you are not a certain way, employee perceptions on bias.

There may also occur signs of stress among employees in an organisational culture rife with perpetuating stereotypes.

6.3.2.6 Offensive or inappropriate humour

Based on the responses analysed, the theme of inappropriate humour has three parts. Firstly, it includes participants disclosing their sexual identity using humour; secondly, it occurs when a colleague makes jokes about participants, which results in the participant disclosing his/her sexual identity; and, thirdly, when the post-disclosure communication between participants and a colleague or colleagues includes continual jokes or mockery related to gay individuals.

Based on the responses of the following three participants, it is argued that, at times, colleagues of the participants use humour about gay individuals by joking about them or saying things in jest about gay people. This is similar to the discussions on defiance as part of the reality-altering event and the theme of defensive reaction to ridicule. In the first example, a participant saw her manager at church, when she was with her partner, and, although nothing happened at church, the gay individual explained how *… later, during the week at work, it came out that I was gay and all seemed to be fine. However, I did start to notice that it became a tool for this person to joke about. At every work function after the fact that I was gay had become knowledge to most of my colleagues, this specific colleague would make jokes about it and snide comments in front of all my other work colleagues and the worst was that they all seemed to think it was funny*.

This joking is a form of discrimination and is not conducive to a positive organisational climate and/or culture. One of the participants equated this joking with other forms of bigotry such as racism. She said *… people will speak to them in a derogatory manner – they will make jokes about them not with them about them to other colleagues– it's the same as – racism – and between different cultures. There will always be people that will always make fun of other people. I mean even if you are – have big ears or an ugly nose – people will discriminate against you. It's the same thing*.

In the last instance, a participant explained how he was on a trip with a colleague and they were sitting closely together in the stands at a baseball game with a client and how the colleague made a joke *… we were chatting there and so then I dunno we were all like pretty close and some joke came up and he was like oh ja* [Afrikaans word for "yes"], *but we not that close in that way kind of thing*. The participant explained that he did not

mind, because it *… didn't in my mind come out maliciously, it was like a once off comment*. While some participants saw the use of humour as a non-event, it can be argued, based on the discussions on organisational climate and/or culture in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4), that this type of mockery of gay individuals does not support a supportive organisational climate and/or culture. In fact, it contributes to a defensive culture by promoting gay individuals to defend either themselves or other gay individuals.

Based on some of the participant responses, it is posited that, at times humour was used, either when the participants or their colleague were trying to make light of the disclosure or treat it as insignificant. However, given the analogies these are still negative *… I think when I first came out in my company you know it was - it was a big joke. 'Cos it's a bunch of men and everybody makes jokes …* This participant started off by making it a non-event, but when the researcher asked if the jokes were made with her or behind her back, she said *… no, they would [joke], well, behind my back. And then with me and they would also chirp about somebody that walked in and, you know – they would chirp*. This meant that they would ask her if she thought the woman walking in was attractive. This resembles the previous discussions on treating a gay woman as "one of the guys". Although this was discussed extensively previously, what was interesting to note in this quotation, is that this woman works in an environment dominated by men, where, as suggested by the evidence in the findings, this type of humour is more prevalent and more acceptable, whereas it would not be tolerated in other environments. When the participant was asked how she coped with this she said *… agh you know – At the beginning, you joke with them and things – you know – you know, after a while people get to know you and they respect you and they work with you and – um – they stop*. Participants downplaying by participants inappropriate humour is a common theme throughout the responses. It appears as if they almost take on the responsibility of the poor behaviour of colleagues as "part and parcel" of being gay in a working environment. Once again, this could impact on the organisational climate and/or culture as being perceived as not supportive of women or gay individuals.

In juxtaposition to a colleague making jokes about gay individuals, there are times when a colleague does not believe the individual is gay and thinks s/he is joking. The following participant's quotation was also part of stereotyping, but is cross-referenced here, because it also relates to humour and about not taking it seriously, because the person

does not fit the stereotypical mould. She said … *three quarters didn't believe me that I was gay. They thought I was joking because I do not stereotypically look gay*.

6.4 Conclusion

One of the most prominent aspects in the analyses of the findings is that the disclosure and subsequent re-communication patterns that occur post-disclosure of participants' sexual identity is unique to each interaction behaviour between gay individuals and the colleagues that find out they are gay. The elements that participants consider when deciding to disclose their sexual identity and the self-preservation communication strategies that they use, may influence the way in which disclosure occurs – either by the type of communication disclosure strategy selected for disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues, or when the gay individuals' are prompted to disclose their sexual identity spontaneously. Moreover, when someone else discloses the gay individuals' sexual identity to colleagues, the gay individuals do not have control over the disclosure. Due to the complexity of the interaction behaviour and co-constructed social realities between colleagues and the uniqueness of each relationship between the participants and colleagues, the participants need to evaluate the perceived risks and their possible effects on their current and future interaction behaviour with a particular colleague. The findings clearly reflect that, in some cases, the reality-altering event (disclosure) leads to more open and spontaneous interaction behaviour between the participants and colleagues and, therefore, positive re-communication. In other cases, the re-communication is negative, leading to less meaningful interaction behaviour between the participants and their colleagues.

The positive re-communication is evidenced as significantly improving the interaction behaviour into more open and spontaneous communication interactions. This may lead to more positively perceived organisational climates and/or cultures and to gay individuals being more productive and contented in their working environment. Neutral responses are considered positive because of participants indicating feeling positive and perceiving nothing to have changed in their relationship with these colleagues. In juxtaposition, negative re-communication contributes to an unsupportive organisational climate and/or culture. Negative re-communication, particularly by a senior staff member, with the employee may cause an alteration in attitude and behaviour of the gay individuals. In extreme cases, it may lead to the gay individuals feeling harassed and or taking action against those who have been derogatory towards them. If an organisation

is perceived as having an unsupportive and disruptive climate and/or culture, it may have reputational risk and lead to less satisfied employees. Arguably, it is the oscillation between colleagues' response to minority groups, the way in which the organisation deals with such encounters, and "lives out" their policies that may result in a perception of how positive and supportive the members of the organisation are to gay individuals.

It is posited that, if organisations ensure that their leaders and employees are well positioned to support minority groups, if they design and apply strong policies, and if the language in the organisation is supportive of gay rights, then gay individuals will feel more secure in disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague. It is also critical for professionals to maintain their professional identity and to remember that an organisational context is not a place for personal prejudice and relationships. Even if employees do form friendships with colleagues, their professional identity must be maintained. That having been said, the findings also illustrate that participants depend on work friendships and close bonds and relationships to consider an organisational context to be a happy and engaging space. Therefore, the protection of minority groups becomes even more critical post-disclosure and in the re-communication, when gay individuals and their colleagues are interacting in a space where their sexual identity is disclosed. As a form of symbolic interaction, re-communication influences the construction and later deconstruction of the co-constructed social reality between gay individuals and their colleagues during the self-preservation communication stage of non-disclosure and during the reality-altering event (disclosure). The perception of if this disclosure is either a positive or a negative experience for the participants also comes to the fore.

It is suggested that, in order to have positive re-communication, with colleagues, the participants need to perceive their colleagues' responses to their disclosure as positive. This positive disclosure experience leads to an alteration in the interaction between the gay individual and the colleague to whom s/he is disclosing: the communication becomes more spontaneous and open, and in some cases, a friendship develops. Should this not happen and the re-communication leads to less meaningful communication and/or, in some cases, stereotypical social constructions of gay individuals being perpetuated by colleagues and a negative meaning ascribed to what it means to be gay, then this could lead to negative re-communication.

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings and an interpretation of the findings of the final two of the four dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework. It involved the way in which disclosure of the participants' sexual identity occurred and the resultant re-communication, from both a perceived positive, neutral and negative positioning. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the disclosure of an individual's sexual identity and of the phenomenon of re-communication itself. It was positive to note that, the participants did have some negative experiences, for the most part, their disclosure experiences were positive. However, it is prudent that organisations consider the importance of sensitisation of their staff, particularly in industries where discrimination still abounds, in order to create supportive and inclusive organisational climates and/or cultures.

In the following chapter, which is the final chapter of this thesis, the conclusions are drawn that relate to the research questions and objectives of this study. Recommendations are made and the contributions, limitations and significance of this study are addressed. Propositions will be provided for a wider implementation of the findings, and, in order to give this study heuristic value, suggestions will be made for further research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete. ~ Buckminster-Fuller

7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), the insights gained in the ten face-to-face interviews and through the 11 narratives were interpreted in accordance with the following four dominant themes and each of their associated broad themes and sub-themes: (i) the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure; (ii) self-preservation communication strategies; (iii) the reality-altering event (disclosure of sexual identity in this case); and (iv) re-communication. By providing thick descriptions of the communication phenomenon of re-communication and a conceptual framework for re-communication after a reality-altering event, these findings confirmed the research goal and sub-goals. The phenomenon of re-communication has not been identified and explained until now, when it has been identified and been named as such. The framework illustrates the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour. In the context of this study, the reality-altering event occurred when gay individuals' sexual identity was disclosed to colleagues in their organisational contexts, either by the gay individuals' themselves or by someone else. Subsequently, the influence of this disclosure – either through self-preservation communication strategies or the communication types used to disclose sexual identity – was investigated.

The conceptual framework for re-communication was developed from the themes extrapolated from the thematic textual analysis. In order to explain the unexplored communication phenomenon of re-communication and to develop a re-communication conceptual framework for it, the study focused on the way in which strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised in any reality-altering event to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated by the individual experiencing the reality-altering event or by persons external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure became the reality-altering event. Therefore, the re-communication conceptual framework focused on: (i) the elements that influenced disclosure or non-

disclosure; (ii) self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosing an individual's sexual identity and/or to continue concealing the reality-altering event; (iii) the actual reality-altering event, which in this case, disclosing a gay individual's sexual identity to colleagues; and (iv) re-communication as part of the framework, whereby, there was a perceived alteration in communication post-disclosure due to the altered social reality. Within the context of this study, it was argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague is altered, from a position of being unaware of the individual's sexual identity to a position of knowing.

This concluding chapter is structured as follows:

- The relevance of the theories to the findings;
- Research, purpose, problems and questions reviewed;
- Key findings;
- Research goals reviewed;
- Developing the re-communication conceptual framework;
- Limitations;
- Heuristic value and suggestions for further research;
- Contribution of the study; and
- Conclusion.

7.2 Relevance of the theories to the findings

In the selection of the relevant theories, the purpose and focus of the study were considered. The focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication) – not on the exploration of gender and sexual identity *per se*. Although the focus of the study involved gay individuals, it did not focus on the construction of their sexual identity. Hence, gay individuals were used as an example or a case study, in order to apply the theoretical principles of the phenomenon and re-communication conceptual framework being developed, but any other case of a reality-altering event could also have been utilised. Therefore, the focus of the study was not on the discourse of homosexuality and the construction or deconstruction of heteronormativity and social norms, but rather on the potential influence of disclosure of *any* reality-altering event on interaction behaviour and the way in which it may alter co-constructed social realities. Furthermore, it was also highlighted that this was not a Psychology study and, therefore, the reasons for an

individual being gay and/or disclosure theories from the field of Psychology fell outside of the scope of this study. Moreover, although it was recognised that there are several theories related to the social construction of reality, interaction behaviour, disclosure and social cognition, these theories do not specifically provide in-depth insight into the influence that reality-altering events have on interaction behaviour with colleagues and co-constructed social realities.

It was recognised that, due to the highly complex nature of communication, a “formula” or solution to improve interaction behaviour would not be feasible. Hence, the position of this researcher was that of Craig (1999:161–199), who posits that the only way to understand the complexity of communication is if people come to the understanding that communication will never be united by a single theory. There will always be multiple theories, based on specific communication settings that provide insight into this complex phenomenon. Hence, a multi-theoretical orientation and multi-disciplinary approach was used that could assist in exploring and naming a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon and its subsequent re-communication conceptual framework. This view of a multi-theoretical orientation also supported the interpretivist position on knowledge construction – i.e. that the human social world is subjective and in a constant state of flux.

7.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism

It was established that symbolic interactionism focuses on the process of interaction in the formation of meanings, through the interpretation of symbols and language, as the carrier of these symbols. In other words, symbolic interactionism explores the way in which individuals interact with one another and society, and form meaning through these interactions. In this case, it involved the experiences and meaning that participating gay individuals ascribed to the disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues within the organisational context.

The researcher drew on the core tenets of symbolic interactionism to entrench the study in the interpretivist paradigm as the theoretical foundation alongside social constructionism and constructivism. It was purported that all the theories discussed built on the key areas of the social construction of reality, meaning, language and the symbols used to convey messages. These areas were relevant to creating a greater depth of understanding of the perceived influence a reality-altering event has on interaction behaviour and the alteration of co-constructed social realities between individuals.

It was purported that, within the context of this study, symbolic interactionism referred to how gay individuals construct their co-constructed social realities with their colleagues. Based on these co-constructed social realities, the gay individuals would then decide on the self-preservation communication strategies, when they are still deciding if or how they would disclose their sexual identity to a colleague, and during the reality-altering event itself, when they actually do tell a colleague that they are gay or a colleague tells others the individual is gay. Collectively, all self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event and re-communication will shape the gay individuals' meaning of interacting as gay individuals' within their organisational contexts.

Symbolic interactionism was noted as being particularly relevant to this study for several reasons, many of which were outlined in Chapter 1 and 2. However, it should be noted that one of the foremost reasons for symbolic interactionism being relevant, is that it subscribes to the interpretivist ontological and epistemological positions, which is the paradigm from within which this study was conducted and should be read. Interaction behaviour with a colleague is a personal form of interaction and it is important for individuals to build relationships with their colleagues to work more effectively, even though these are generally professional relationships. In the analysis and supported by the literature in Chapter 3, it was found that positive work relationships in the organisation are important for particular reasons, including, but not limited to, increased productivity, mental wellbeing, job satisfaction and a cooperative organisational climate and/or culture. Theories and approaches such as symbolic interactionism, which attempt to explain and deepen an understanding of the possible influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour and the alteration of co-constructed social realities, are particularly useful for the required in-depth analysis.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that individuals co-construct their social realities through their interactions with others, which is why they are co-constructed social realities. Socially constructed reality is in a constant state of flux and, the more individuals are exposed to it, the more they interact with others, and the more their own and their co-constructed social realities will be co-constructed and re-constructed, based on their experiences. These experiences will develop individuals' own realities and co-constructed social realities. Individuals perceive and interpret each interaction that they have in a different way, which means that socially constructed reality and interaction behaviour are reciprocal and intertwined.

Another reason for symbolic interactionism being relevant is that this was a communication study and symbolic interactionists posit that individuals develop meaning by means of interaction behaviour (in symbolic interactionism communication and relationships are often referred). The ability to use language as a symbolic way of organising thought is acquired via the communication process through interaction behaviour. Communication cannot take place without shared meaning of the symbols that are used to give interaction behaviour meaning. Symbolic interactionism is a theory that looks at the way in which individuals construct and co-construct their social reality and find significance in meaning through their interaction behaviour.

7.2.2 Social constructionism

The researcher focused on the meaning of social constructionism in the context of this study, and not the different accounts or applications of social construction, such as the social construction of emotions or identity, for example. Consequently, socially constructed reality is understood differently by different researchers, resulting in different approaches and perspectives. Social reality, which is a social construction, is in a constant state of flux. Consequently, socially constructed reality exists and is based on an individual's personal experiences and social constructions of his/her co-constructed social reality at a given point in time and in the society in which s/he operates and *vice versa*. Hence, socially constructed reality is constantly changing, based on each individual's personal experiences and social constructions, coupled with the joint co-creation of social reality that s/he experiences with others. In this case, it is not only the social constructions linked to the communication used for disclosure of being gay, but also the gay individuals' personal experiences of disclosing their sexual identity, and the way this, in turn, has influenced their personal realities and their co-constructed social realities with others. Moreover, the existing co-constructed social realities that they share with colleagues is also influenced by disclosure, because, as the disclosure takes place, the co-constructed social reality that the gay individual shares with a colleague, is altered, from a position of the colleague not knowing or not being sure the individual is gay to a position of knowing.

Social constructionism was selected as a theory, based on its emphasis on social constructs, the meaning ascribed to each construct differing from individual-to-individual and society-to-society and the unique nature of these co-constructed social realities.

However, it was also acknowledged that socially constructed realities are jointly constructed understandings of the world. Thus, in this case, each gay individual has unique co-constructed social realities with each of the colleagues to whom they disclose. However, their own and their colleagues' perceptions would also be influenced by the meaning, symbols and jointly constructed understandings of gay individuals in the societies in which they operate. Therefore, social constructionism was deemed an important theoretical consideration for this study.

7.2.3 Constructivism

In juxtaposition to social constructionism, which deals with, as was established by Bleakley (2003:409), the social processes involved in the production of reality, constructivism focuses on individuals' constructions of reality. However, it was noted that the perceived value of constructivism in the context of this research problem would relate better to those colleagues with whom the gay individuals were using communication strategies to disclose their sexual identity, and that was not the purpose of the study.

Constructivism, and in particular the complexity and/or sophistication an individual has of organising, perceiving and interpreting things was most relevant. Therefore, the focus was on cognitive complexity. It was argued that the more cognitively complex a person is, the more sophisticated or cognitively complex his/her re-communication with his/her colleague would be. It was maintained that cognitively complex individuals might also be able to alter their interaction behaviour to suit the social setting in which they are engaged at a particular time, and, might be more perceptive in selecting self-preservation communication strategies and the reality-altering event. In other words, depending on with whom the gay individual is communicating, s/he would decide which self-preservation communication strategies and the communication disclosure s/he believes would be most suitable for the most positive outcome.

7.2.4 Sexual and professional identities

It was purported that identity could be considered as developing and taking shape, based on an individual's personal experiences and the meaning s/he ascribes to a given situation. However, this individualistic experience will also be influenced by the individual's social construction of his/her reality and co-constructed social realities with others. It was established that identity is constantly in a state of flux and, with each experience, an individual's identity is shared and developed.

In the context of this study, each time gay individuals select communication strategies to avoid or conceal their sexual identity and use communication strategies and/or use spontaneous communication to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts, it contributes to the formation of their professional identities. It was posited that individuals' sexual identity are part of their personal identities and their professional identities almost stand separately to this. However, there are times when the two connect or intersect. In the disclosure of an individual's sexual identity within his/her organisational contexts, there is divergence between the professional and personal identities, even if only for a short period. Importantly, it was noted that an individual's identity is always multiple and never singular.

In order to contextualise the selection of the term *sexual identity* to describe gay individuals in this study, the concept of sexual orientation versus sexual identity were explored. In the section on sexual identity and sexual orientation in Chapter 3, it was stated that sexual orientation should not be confused with sexual identity. Sexual identity is an individual's self-recognition of his/her sexual orientation and sexual behaviour and the meaning that an individual ascribes to sexual orientation and behaviour. It was noted that, similar to other social identities, sexual identity is made up of varied continuums and socialisation of ongoing relationships. Therefore, it was the most appropriate choice when referring to gay individuals in this study.

It was recognised that a critical influence on the interaction behaviour between gay individuals and colleagues is the fact that individuals operate within a heteronormative context. Thus, the way in which a gay individual's colleagues frame their socially constructed realities related to gay individuals is based on a heteronormative frame of reference. It is posited that an individual's frame of reference influences the way in which they behave and it could influence how they respond. However, more importantly to note, for the most part, people treat everyone as if they are heterosexual, which puts pressure on gay people to disclose their sexual identity. Therefore, heteronormativity was discussed.

7.2.5 Disclosure

The primary focus in the discussions on disclosure was the influence of disclosure on relationship formation and continuation. As was established, the relational development and social exchange theories did not form part of the theoretical foundation of this study. However, with the discussions on the meaning of disclosure as a voluntary means of

disseminating personal information, the social penetration theory was explored as an application of disclosure, because this theory supports the explanations of the reasons for disclosure and is central to relationship development. In the social penetration theory, it is purported that disclosure takes place at different levels, depending on the relationship involved, but disclosure generally takes place when an individual feels secure enough to reveal personal information to a particular person within a specific context. This was evidenced in the findings, in that several participants elucidated that, if they shared a meaningful relationship with a colleague, they were more likely to disclose their sexual identity to them.

7.2.6 Organisational communication

Although organisations have different types of communication, only those that are particularly relevant to this study were described. The findings showed that some of the informal organisational communication types, such as grapevine communication, was the way in which a participant's sexual identity was revealed in the organisation. On the other hand, it also indicated that gay individuals make use of both self-preservation communication strategies and disclosure communication when their sexual identity is either not disclosed or disclosed in the organisational context. It was established that, when individuals are more cautious and purposeful about their communication, they would use interpersonal communication strategies. However, when they open up to colleagues and feel, they can disclose information, the communication shifts from strategic communication to spontaneous and open forms of communication.

The focus on interaction behaviour and appropriate forms of interaction behaviour in the organisation was covered, because the purpose of this study hinged on the influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour in the organisation. In this way, the expectations and boundaries of what is deemed as appropriate organisational interactions become pivotal. It was established that, when individuals are more cautious and purposeful about their communication, they would use interpersonal communication strategies.

7.2.7 Organisational climates and cultures

It was found that the organisational climate and/or culture in which the participants work in is critical to disclosure, as well as the influence of organisational climate and/or culture on disclosure and on general work wellbeing.

In the data extrapolation, it was found and supported by the literature that one of the influencers of open and spontaneous communication is an open and positive organisational climate and/or culture. It was established that organisational culture is essentially tacit social knowledge of an organisation that includes rituals, beliefs, norms, attitudes and values. Within the context of the discussions in Chapter 3, organisational culture was defined as "the tacit social order of an organization: It shapes attitudes and behaviors in wide-ranging and durable ways. Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group. When properly aligned with personal values, drives, and needs, culture can unleash tremendous amounts of energy toward a shared purpose and foster an organization's capacity to thrive" (Groysberg *et al* 2018). The organisational climate was explained as having a link to the feeling that individuals have towards the organisation. The climate includes that which the organisation stands for and the positive or negative ambience that is projected by those within the organisation (Ashkanasy & Hartel 2014:136–137; Jex *et al* 2014:179–180).

As was purported in the literature and supported in the findings, cooperative organisational climates and/or cultures foster inclusion and, therefore, the characteristics that make an organisation a cooperative workspace. Therefore, the contexts of supportive and defensive climates, diversity climates and psychologically safe organisational contexts were explored.

Moreover, both in the supporting literature and in the findings of this study, organisational climate and/or culture has been ascribed to impel the degree to which an organisational context and specific units in the organisation are considered productive, on the positive side, and counterproductive, on the negative side. It was also claimed that environments that promote psychological safety, encourage disclosure, as they are environments of respect.

Additionally, the literature supported the findings, which demonstrated that gay individuals, who are able to be openly gay within their organisations, without having to face discrimination or social isolation, generally have a better mental wellbeing; are more productive and satisfied at work and loyal to the organisations in which they work. The experience of this disclosure and the way it has influenced gay individuals' interaction behaviours with colleagues, will ultimately be integrated into the development and fluidity of their professional identity. As was already established, having positive interpersonal

relationships with colleagues is important for several reasons, but arguably, most importantly, because it may lead to, amongst other things, job satisfaction, mental wellbeing, trust relationships, loyalty and increased productivity.

The literature on organisational climate and/or culture was supported throughout by various case studies embedded in the discussions to provide insights and depth to the study. It was argued that individuals' experiences of acceptance or discrimination in the organisations in which they work and how individuals perceive their disclosure experiences are important – even if it is perception-based – because peoples' perceptions become their reality.

It was argued that discrimination in the organisational context does not always occur in the form of formal discrimination; it may also be informal and occur within social settings in the organisation. It was argued that the varied aspects of the organisational context such as, but not limited to, policies, superior versus subordinate relationships, and others can encourage or discourage disclosure. It was also argued that, when individuals are more cautious about disclosure and/or trying not to disclose personal information, their communication is considered strategic. However, once communication is more open, then it changes from strategic to spontaneous communication. It was found that a more inclusive environment for sharing could garner employee loyalty, better team cooperation, a more cooperative organisational reality, trust amongst employees, increased employee wellbeing and more effective communication.

7.3 Research purpose, problem and questions reviewed

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication). Within the context of this study, this alteration in communication was referred to as *re-communication*. In order to explore this communication phenomenon, the study focused on the influence of disclosure on altering the communication between gay individuals and their colleagues after their sexual identity has been disclosed as gay to their colleagues. It was argued that people, and in this case colleagues, co-construct social realities through their interaction behaviour. It was further argued that, because heterosexuality is the norm and the language and meanings ascribed to symbols that are dominant within society support heteronormativity, people often assume that a colleague is heterosexual and construct their social reality based on this notion. Going into an interaction, both the gay

individuals and their colleagues will have their own socially constructed reality that they have constructed through their experiences, as well as their co-constructed social realities they share with each colleague with whom they interact. Gay individuals are often placed in a position where they use either strategic or spontaneous communication to either employ self-preservation communication strategies to avoid or conceal their sexual identity and/or disclose their sexual identity. Moreover, unlike other diversity factors such as race, gender and physical disability, being gay is not usually aesthetically noticeable. Even in cases where it is more noticeable than in others, it remains speculative, until the person's sexual identity is revealed.

In order to explain this unexplored communication phenomenon, a further purpose was to develop a re-communication conceptual framework for it. The study focused on how, in any reality-altering event, either strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised to disclose information that could alter the co-constructed reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual experiencing a reality-altering event, or by persons or forms of communication external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure, then, became the reality-altering event. The re-communication conceptual framework, therefore, included (i) elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure; (ii) self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosing or concealing the reality-altering event; (iii) the framework focused on the actual reality-altering event, which in this case, is when a gay individual's sexual identity of being gay is disclosed to colleagues; (iv) the framework looked at re-communication, whereby, there is a perceived alteration in communication post-disclosure due to the altered reality. Within the context of this study, it was argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague is altered from a position of being unaware the individual is gay to a position of knowing. However, it was posited that, although disclosure of sexual identity was selected as the example of the reality-altering event, there are multiple reality-altering events in different contexts to which the dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework could have been applied. It is noted that some of the sub-themes are specific to gay individuals.

This research purpose was probed by, firstly, utilising deductive reasoning, based on the seminal works of the theories covered in the theoretical foundation in Chapter 2, namely symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and constructivism, and the literature reviews in Chapter 3, as well as the researcher's own experiences. The deductive

reasoning resulted in three possible areas in which the researcher could probe participants in the grouping of questions for the in-depth semi-structured interviews and narrative discourses. These areas were: the communication strategies that individuals use to avoid disclosure or conceal their sexual identity; the communication disclosure strategies and/or spontaneous communication that lead to the disclosure of the gay individual's sexual identity to colleagues, either by the gay individual themselves or via someone else disclosing; what happens to the communication between the gay individuals and their colleagues, once they find out the person is gay. All of this was explored within an individual's organisational context.

By analysing the data from the in-depth interviews and the narrative discourse, it was induced that there was, in fact, another aspect that had not deductively been considered – i.e. the things that may influence someone when deciding whether to reveal their sexual identity as gay to colleagues in the organisational context or not. Off this backdrop and by using open, axial and selective coding, the dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes were extrapolated from the thematic textual analysis. Out of these themes, an in-depth understanding of the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication) was obtained.

The dominant themes that emerged from the elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure, the self-preservation communication strategies, the reality-altering event (which was disclosure of sexual identity) and re-communication became the building blocks towards the re-communication conceptual framework, along with the definitions of each of the broad themes. Moreover, it was posited that the purpose of the study involved the influence of a reality-altering event, and not just the disclosure of sexual identity. Therefore, it was purported that, although disclosure of sexual identity was selected as the example of the reality-altering event, there are multiple reality-altering events that to which the presented re-communication conceptual framework could be applied in varying contexts.

The specific influence of the disclosure of a reality-altering event on the participants in this study has been discussed in the preceding sections.

7.4 Key findings

The research problem was that there is little extant knowledge on the possible influences of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour emerging after a reality-altering event, termed *re-communication* for the purpose of this study. Consequently, a gap was identified in the body of knowledge and a need for the identification, explanation and labelling of a communication phenomenon that is currently poorly understood. There was also little existing information to provide an in-depth understanding and thick description of how, in any reality-altering event, either strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual experiencing a reality-altering event, or persons or forms of communication external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure becomes the reality-altering event.

Out of the thematic textual analysis, thick descriptions emerged that could contribute to the body of knowledge related to the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour between colleagues in the organisational context. These descriptions were formulated into a re-communication conceptual framework, which was also presented diagrammatically. The previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon of re-communication was described, analysed and, in Chapter 6, an argument was put forward regarding this. The elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure, the self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosure or conceal the reality-altering event, the actual reality-altering event, and re-communication were analysed, defined and thick descriptions were provided of each of these, as they relate to the findings and interpretation presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

The specific research question and goals aligned to this study are answered in the following sections.

7.5 Research questions

7.5.1 Research question 1

Research Question 1: What influences gay individuals to either disclose or not-disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?

This research question was answered in the following way:
The findings of the study indicate that there are elements within an organisational context that are likely to encourage or discourage gay individuals to reveal their sexual identity. Based on the findings it appears that this decision is dependent on the interpersonal engagement and is unique to every encounter.

In answering the research question, the elements that could encourage or discourage disclosure were grouped into four broad themes: (i) the *physical location* of where disclosure takes place or where a gay individual resides and/or works; (ii) the *organisational identity* of their place of work and the way in which gay individuals were perceived to be treated, included and supported; (iii) *disclosure motivators*; and (iv) *disclosure detractors*. Each of these themes, which is defined and tabulated for readability purposes in Table 7.1, answer the research question by explaining why these specific elements influenced disclosure, based on the perceptions of the participants.

Out of the four broad themes that are perceived to influence gay individuals in terms of either disclosing or not disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues in their organisational contexts, there were sub-themes that emerged as influencers of disclosure or non-disclosure. These sub-themes also support the answer to the research question and for ease of reading, these also feature in Table 7.1 and are explained in detail in Chapter 5.

Table 7.1: Sub-themes associated with each broad theme of the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure of sexual identity in the organisational context

Broad themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
Physical location	At times, the location/region in which gay individuals work, impacts on how and/or if they will disclose their sexual identity	• Physical location impacting disclosure
Organisational identity	References to how gay individuals perceive the treatment, inclusion and support they receive within their organisational contexts	• Organisational policies • Policy and practice implementation by management • Supportive management contingent • Supportive and Psychologically safe work spaces
Disclosure motivators	Elements that gay individuals perceive as motivating them to disclose their sexual identity more freely to a colleague or colleagues, as well as the colleagues with whom gay individuals choose to share personal information in the organisational context and why	• Meaningful relationships at work • Guilt/Dissonance • Trust in colleagues • Attitude and behaviour
Disclosure detractors	Elements that gay individuals perceive as preventing them from disclosing their sexual identity more freely to a colleague, as well as the colleagues with whom gay individuals choose not to share personal information in the organisational context and why	• Attitude and behaviour • Conservative ideologies • Fear of rejection or social isolation

7.5.2 Research question 2

Research Question 2: What communication strategies do gay individuals use when they do not yet want to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?

This research question was answered in the following way:
It was found that, once the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure had been evaluated, gay individuals engaged in certain strategies to conceal their sexual identities.

These strategies were divided into four broad themes. Firstly, it was found that there were times that gay individuals used avoidance strategies, so that they did not have to disclose their sexual identity at a given point. Secondly, it emerged that gay individuals avoided disclosure by means of the personal pronoun game. Thirdly, it was found that, at times, gay individuals used non-conforming strategies.

The key findings indicate that the duration of the use of self-preservation communication strategies may differ, depending on how open the gay individual is and/or how comfortable s/he feels with a given colleague. However, regardless of how long most of the participants engaged in self-preservation communication, even if for a moment, they used a self-preservation communication strategy.

Each of these themes is defined and tabulated in Table 7.2 for readability purposes and in answer to the research question. Out of the four broad themes that evidenced what communication strategies gay individuals involved in this study used when they did not want to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues yet. There were sub-themes that emerged as ways of gay individuals ensuring that their sexual identity is not disclosed that also contribute to the self-preservation communication strategies. For ease of reading, these also feature in Table 7.2 and are explained in detail in Chapter 5.

Table 7.2: Sub-themes associated with each of the broad themes of self-preservation communication strategies

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
Avoidance strategies	Include any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' avoidance of disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague. Examples include, but are not limited to, avoiding discussions about personal information with their colleagues, or avoiding or deflecting questions about their personal lives. This also includes gay individuals avoiding disclosure of their sexual identity or concealing being gay, being selective of whom they choose to, or only telling half-truths – even lying – about the fact that they are gay, even if only for a short period.	• Physically leaving a location/conversation • Deflection • Lies of omission • Lies of commission • Ignore questions or comments made about their personal life • Selective disclosure
Personal pronoun game	Any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' use of personal pronouns when referring to a partner or prospective partner prior to disclosure of their sexual identity, in order to avoid a colleague knowing what the gender of their partner is. For example, using "they" or "we", instead of gender specific personal pronouns such as "her" or "him". This theme also includes the use of purposeful strategic communication, such as the use of gender neutral words such as "partner" or "my other half", as opposed to gender specific	• Avoid personal pronouns • Use gender neutral terms • Use of the word "partner"

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
	terms like "husband", "wife" or "boyfriend " and "girlfriend"	
Non-conforming strategies	Any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' non-conformity to disclosure of their sexual identity because of working in a heteronormative environment	• Going against heteronormativity • Defiance of heteronormative environments

7.5.3 Research question 3

Research Question 3: What communication strategies and/or interaction behaviours do gay individuals use or engage in to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?

This research question was answered in the following way:

The findings indicated that disclosure of a gay individual's sexual identity could happen in three ways. Firstly, the disclosure was found to happen via communication disclosure strategies with two broad themes: defiance and strategic leading and communication.

Secondly, it was found that the disclosure sometimes occurred spontaneously, with the two broad themes of spontaneous communication being a defensive reaction to ridicule and incidents when disclosure "just happened". Finally, it was found that, at times, the disclosure was out of the gay individual's control, because disclosure came from an external source.

Each of these broad themes is defined to answer the research question and to provide shared meaning for the reader. For ease of reading, these are tabulated in Table 7.3. Out of the various ways in which participants' sexual identity was disclosed (i.e. communication disclosure strategies, spontaneous communication disclosure and externally controlled disclosure), multiple sub-themes emerged connected to the communication strategies and/or interaction behaviours in which gay individuals engage to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues. For ease of reference, these are indicated in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Sub-themes associated with each of the broad themes of the reality-altering event

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
Communication disclosure strategies		
Defiance	Any elements that demonstrate that the way in which the gay individual has disclosed his/her sexual identity in a brazen or bold way, including the use of shock tactics. It is important to note that defiance is only a communication strategy when it is a planned and considered disclosure. If it were spontaneous, then it would form part of the sub-theme of 'it just happened'.	• Eliciting some form of shock • Uncontrolled form of disclosure such as "blurting it out" • When gay individuals only disclose their sexual identity if a colleague or colleagues ask directly
Strategic leading and communication	When gay individuals make a choice to communicate in a way that results in them disclosing their sexual identity by chance, but still by their own choice. This includes elements of gay individuals in some way hinting about being gay or leading a colleague to find out that s/he is gay. It would include gay individuals strategically communicating in such a way that leads a colleague to ask questions, resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity.	• Accidental disclosure • Utilising strategic communication tools • Revealed in the company of colleagues who know • Strategic reference to partner by name • Storytelling • Bring a partner to a function as a "plus one"
Spontaneous communication disclosure		
Defensive reaction to ridicule	Elements when gay individuals feel prompted to disclose their sexual identity, after a colleague has made a derogatory comment or displayed derogatory behaviour about gay individuals in their presence. The defensive reaction often leads gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity	• Defending gay individuals • Derogatory language • Prejudice/discriminatory behaviour
It "Just Happened"	Includes elements that demonstrate that the disclosure of sexual identity within the	• No recollection of how disclosure occurred

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
	organisational context can occur with no specific communication strategies, but rather spontaneously. In this context, a gay individual's sexual identity is disclosed during everyday conversations between him/herself and his/her colleagues, who may piece it together themselves, based on interactions with the gay individual. This theme is also categorised by gay individuals having no recollection of how their sexual identity were disclosed or just "blurting out" this information.	• Disclosure occurred through everyday conversations • Colleagues "just figured it out" • It just came up in conversation between the gay individual and a colleague
Externally controlled disclosure		
"Outed" by others	Elements that demonstrate that gay individuals' sexual identity has been revealed by others or has been revealed accidentally. For example, gay individuals could be intentionally or unintentionally "outed", if a colleague finds out that they are gay via a rumour, gossip or grapevine communication, and the gay individual becomes aware of it. Another example is a colleague being unaware that others are not aware of the individual being gay and "outs" the gay individual to colleagues who do not know the individual is gay.	• Purposeful actions that lead to disclosure • Accidental actions that lead to disclosure • Disclosure via grapevine communication • Disclosure via rumours and/or gossip
Direct questioning	Elements of gay individuals being pushed to disclose their sexual identity by others directly asking them questions about their sexual identity, partner or personal life by a colleague. The gay individual may decide not to answer, but if s/he does answer, then the disclosure has been prompted by external people asking questions.	• Only disclose if directly asked

7.5.4 Research question 4

Research Question 4: What is the perceived alteration of interaction behaviour that occurs after the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity to colleagues within their organisational contexts?

This research question was answered in the following way:

Based on the findings, a perceived alteration was evident in the interaction behaviour occurring after the disclosure of gay individuals' sexual identity to colleagues. These changes were described as either positive, neutral or negative and were termed *re-communication*. Eleven broad themes emerged as part of the re-communication process. Five of the themes emerged as being perceived by gay individuals as positive or neutral and the remaining six were perceived as negative interaction behaviour that occurred after disclosure. The positive changes included more spontaneous communication and a greater understanding of gay people or, in fact, no change in interaction behaviour. Negative changes included discrimination, asking of inappropriate personal questions, social isolation, less meaningful communication, stereotyping and the use of offensive or inappropriate humour. Each of these broad themes is defined and tabulated in Table 7.4 in answer of the research questions. Out of the broad themes, sub-themes emerged and, for ease of reference, these sub-themes are tabulated in Table 7.4, in response to the research question and explained in Chapter 6.

Table 7.4: Sub-themes associated with each of the broad themes of the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
Positive re-communication		
Spontaneous communication	Elements of gay individuals perceiving that their disclosure led to improved and/or more open communication with colleagues. Thus, altering from strategic communication having to measure and consider everything being said to more spontaneous and open communication, where the gay individuals share more in-depth and personal information and have	• Open communication • A feeling that an individual can be his/her true self • Increases inclusivity • More meaningful relationships • Comfort • Increased trust in colleagues

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
	more meaningful relationships with the colleagues to whom they have disclosed	
Positive emotions	Elements where gay individuals' experience any positive emotions linked to the disclosure of their sexual identity as gay.	• Improved mental wellbeing • Authenticity • Relief • Perceived increase in productivity • Gay individuals are positively influenced to tell others
Increased understanding of gay individuals	Elements when gay individuals' disclosure has led to a colleagues improved understanding or acceptance of gay individuals because of their interaction with these colleagues that are gay.	• Common understanding about gay individuals • Altered perception of gay individuals through the relationships developed • Camaraderie
Neutrality	Elements where gay individuals perceived no change or a neutral response to interaction behaviour after disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues. This is categorised as positive, because these colleagues have remained consistent when gay individuals perceived that they may have been judged, but they demonstrated that is not the case.	• Disclosure leads to no perceived change in relationship or interaction behaviour
Positively influence telling others	When gay individuals refer to positive experiences of disclosure positively influencing their willingness to disclose to others.	• Ease of disclosure
Negative re-communication		
Discrimination by superior	Elements where gay individuals' have had negative disclosure encounters with a senior staff member in the organisational context, which has negatively altered their interaction behaviour with their superior.	• Poor management style • Harassment and/or inappropriate behaviour by superior • Bigotry by superior
Personal questions	Elements where communication post-disclosure is linked to any questions that	• Personal questions of a sexual nature

Themes	Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning	Sub-themes
	are of a personal nature or have a sexual or derogatory overture. It also includes discussions on what the gay individual deems as inappropriate to engage in with colleagues.	• Questions about personal information • Comparison to heterosexuality
Social isolation	Elements where gay individuals may perceive that they have been excluded from post-disclosure such as social exclusion. This exclusion may occur for a limited or more extended period.	• Excluded from social interactions or events • Social isolation
Less meaningful communication	Includes elements that demonstrate how gay individuals' disclosure of their sexual identity has led to less meaningful communication with a colleague.	• Inability to share • Less truthful interactions • Barriers to meaningful communication • Prejudiced or judgmental actions
Stereotyping	When communication after gay individuals have disclosed their sexual identity includes stereotyping of gay individuals, based on socially constructed views of what it means to be gay.	• Stereotyping around physical appearance • Stereotyping around the butch/feminine dichotomy • Stereotyping around dress sense
Offensive or inappropriate humour	This theme has three parts: (i) gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity using offensive or inappropriate humour; (ii) a colleague making jokes about gay individuals, resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity; (iii) the post-disclosure communication between gay individuals and a colleague includes continual jokes or mockery related to gay individuals.	• Colleagues joking about gay individuals • Joke about the disclosure • Humour as a protection mechanism

7.6 Research goals reviewed

7.6.1 Primary research objective

The primary research goal of the study was to provide thick descriptions of a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon termed *re-communication* and to provide a re-communication conceptual framework for the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour within the organisational context. Within the context of this study, the reality-altering event occurs when a gay individual's sexual identity is disclosed to colleagues.

The goal of the thick descriptions was achieved through a thematic textual analysis of the data, which resulted in the emergence of four dominant themes, each one having various broad themes and multiple sub-themes. These became the concepts for the re-communication conceptual framework and were discussed in-depth in Chapters 5 and 6. The re-communication conceptual framework, which is illustrated in Section 7.6, provides the context for the re-communication process and the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour within the organisational context.

7.6.2 Secondary research objectives

Sub-goal: Gain an in-depth understanding of how and/or if gay individuals perceive their disclosure to influence their interaction behaviour with their colleagues within their organisational contexts

This goal was achieved by means of the in-depth extrapolations, findings and analyses provided in Chapter 6 under the dominant theme of re-communication, as indicated in Figures 7.1 and 7.2.

However, the key finding was that, when a gay individual uses communication strategies to conceal or disclose his/her sexual identity at a given time to a colleague, the interaction behaviour will be influenced. Even when there is no disclosure, the interaction behaviour is still influenced, even if it may occur through a lie of commission or omission, in which case, the communication is not open or spontaneous. When communication is utilised by either the gay individual and/or someone external to the gay individual to disclose the gay individual's sexual identity to colleagues, the interaction behaviour between the gay individual and his/her colleague is influenced.

The primary finding was that this influence on interaction behaviour either led to more positive or less positive communication. In addition, it was found that the gay individual and the colleague to whom s/he is disclosing alter their communication to be either more open or spontaneous, as in most cases, or to be less meaningful. If individuals can be more open, spontaneous and truthful in their communication with colleagues, then they did not feel they had to sensor and monitor what they said and the communication became more spontaneous, less thought out, and more open. If communication had to remain strategic in an interaction between the gay individuals and their colleagues, it could put strain on a relationship, because the gay individuals could not be themselves; they had to monitor if they were saying the right thing. This could result in psychological stress.

In the following sections, the positive and negative influences on interaction behaviour are discussed, in the form of the identified, explained and labelled communication phenomenon of positive, negative and neutral re-communication.

7.6.2.1 Positive re-communication

The first element that emerged when the interaction behaviour was positive post-disclosure was that of **spontaneous communication.** This included sub-themes of participants perceiving that their disclosure led to improved and/or more open communication with colleagues. Therefore, altering from strategic communication having to measure and consider everything being said to more spontaneous and open communication, where the gay individuals shared more in-depth and personal information and generally expressed that they had more meaningful relationships with the colleagues they disclosed to in this way.

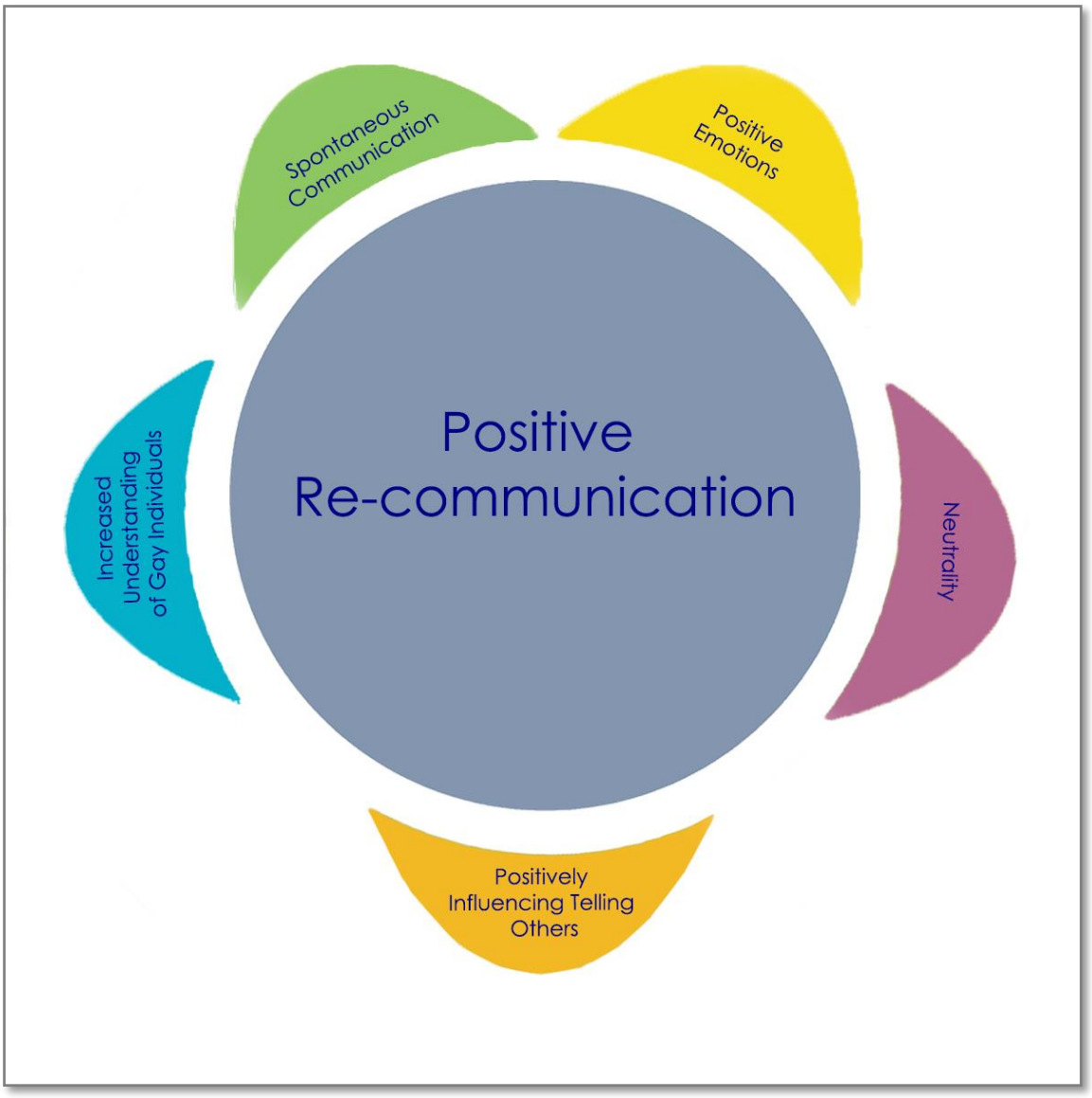


Figure 7.1: Positive re-communication

Numerous positive aspects came out of the findings in terms of how disclosure of participants' sexual identity to colleagues, for the most part, seemed to influence the interaction behaviour. This oscillated between gay individuals using more strategic communication, when they were trying to protect themselves and/or their sexual identity, using self-preservation communication strategies to do this, which were purposeful and planned communication considered, and a more spontaneous form of communication post-disclosure that was expressive and required no prompts or forced interactions. This oscillation was also linked to the *I* and *Me* of symbolic interactionism, where the *Me* will censor all communication during the self-preservation communication stage post-disclosure, whereas the *I* did not need to be monitored by the *Me* anymore.

Another positive aspect of spontaneous communication involved the **comfort** that disclosure brought the participants, in that they felt that they did not have to hide their sexual identity, and that they were comfortable enough to be true to themselves. Participants also expressed that the disclosure of their sexual identity had led to more trusting relationships. Trust was considered highly beneficial and positive within the organisational context. Many of the participants expressed that there was a more open communication engagement emerging between themselves and their colleagues after disclosure. In fact, the relationships were more meaningful and so was the communication because of openness, honesty and trust. Openness contributed to a positive organisational climate and/or culture. Many participants explained how they found it much easier to have an open conversation with colleagues post-disclosure and that they could even share experiences about their lives. Improved camaraderie between colleagues was another element brought to the fore.

Another emerging positive influence on interaction behaviour involved participants experiencing **positive emotions** related to the disclosure of their sexual identity as gay. When participants' disclosures resulted in them perceiving their state of existence as being healthier post-disclosure within their organisational context, it was deemed as positive emotions experienced in re-communication because of disclosure.

There were examples where participants felt that colleagues were trying to demonstrate an **increased understanding of gay individuals** by showing that they shared meaning or showed support in some way or another of gay individuals. This seemed to be a strategy used by the participants' colleagues to communicate acceptance of the gay individual, which aligned with a message at the relational level from a symbolic interactionism perspective, as covered in Chapter 2.

If participants perceived that there was no change to interaction behaviour after disclosure of their sexual identity to a colleague, this **neutrality** was categorised as positive, because this colleague remained consistent towards the gay individuals. The participants may have felt they could be judged by a colleague, but through the colleague's neutrality, s/he demonstrated that it was not the case.

There were times when positive disclosure experiences **positively influenced gay individuals,** resulting in them telling others that they were gay. This was considered positive, because the interaction behaviour being such a positive experience had then positively influenced future communication strategies for disclosure.

It was found that not only were positive influences emerged out of the reality-altering event, but also negative influences, which are as discussed next.

7.6.2.2 Negative influences

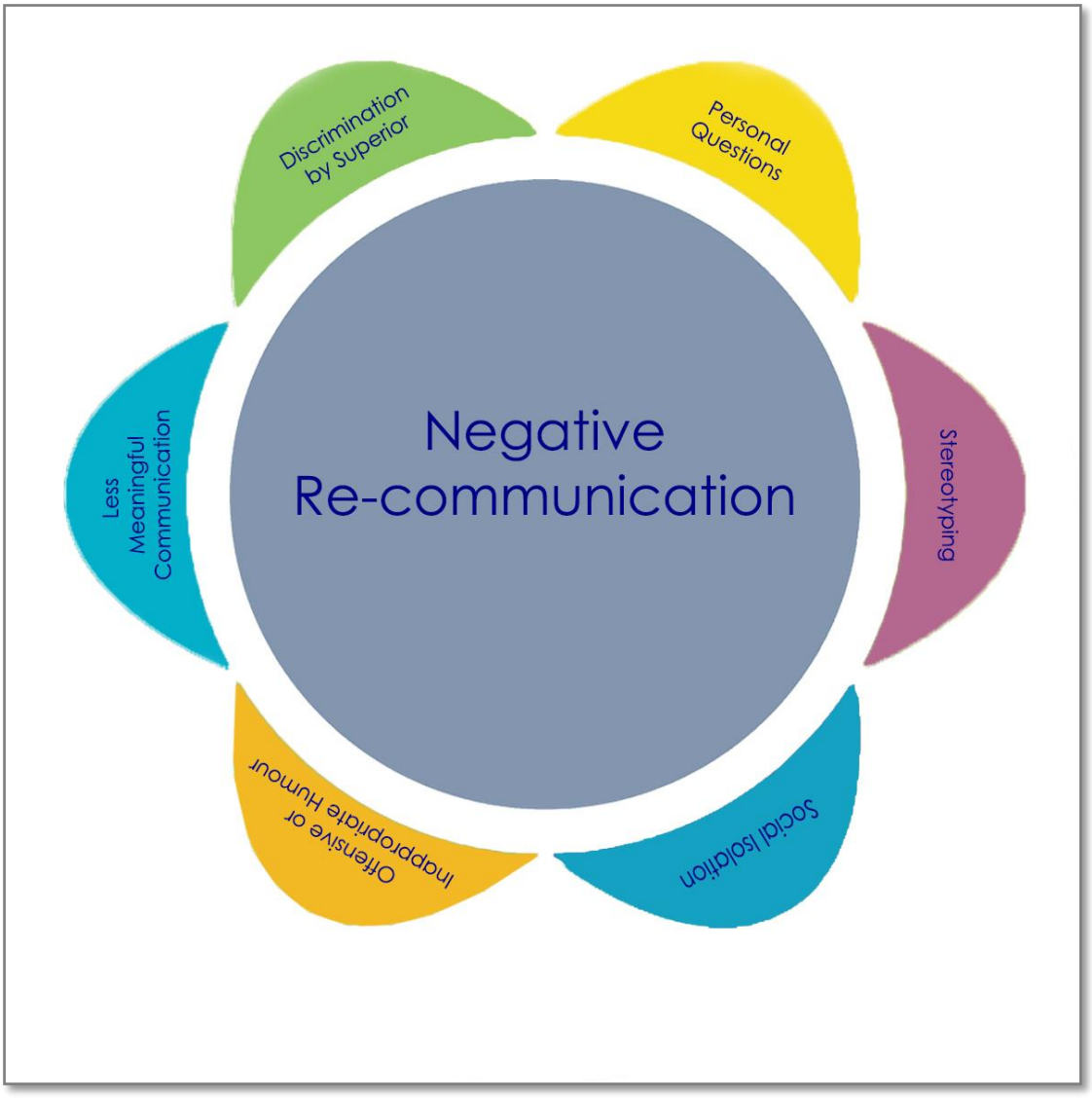


Figure 7.2: Negative re-communication

When participants experienced **discrimination by a superior,** because they were gay, it was perceived as a negative interaction experience. This theme included elements of

participants having negative disclosure encounters (e.g. humiliation) with a senior staff member or a superior in the organisational context, which negatively altered their interaction behaviour with their direct line manager or another senior member of the organisation. As indicated in Chapter 3, an organisational climate and/or culture is influenced by leaders, because they not only contribute to whether an organisational climate and/or culture is well adjusted and positive; they are also accountable for communicating and promoting organisational values and ethos. This, in turn, influences organisational behaviour and attitudes. A person in a position of authority, who misuses this power or uses it with negative impact, influencing organisational climate and/or culture, contributes to a possible negative organisational climate and/or culture. Additionally, the perception of leadership in general is influenced, which may also affect an individual's performance (his/her manager assesses him/her).

There were four specific examples that mentioned managers making inappropriate comments towards participants. These comments included behaviour by a senior person in the participants' organisations fraught with intimidation, harassment, threats and inappropriate comments, thereby, making the participants uncomfortable and causing anxiety and upset. This type of bullying and intimidation may lead to organisational reputational damage and, if managers are perpetuating such behaviour, it may result in a poor organisational climate and/or culture in which discrimination is tolerated. As discussed in Chapter 3, this would be considered a disruptive organisational culture. Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter 3 "… when the interaction between the leadership and employees is good, the latter will make a greater contribution to team communication and collaboration, and will also be encouraged to accomplish the mission and objectives assigned by the organization, thereby enhancing job satisfaction" (Tsai 2011).

There were elements where the interaction behaviour post-disclosure was linked to any questions of a personal nature or having a sexual or derogatory overture. This included discussions with colleagues that participants deemed inappropriate. Asking gay colleagues **personal questions** linked to sexual overtures post-disclosure was deemed inappropriate in a work context and, while colleagues generally would not speak about this to heterosexual colleagues, examples provided implied that the same boundaries were not considered when the colleague involved was gay.

Moreover, some of the questions that emerged from the data had significant sexual overtures and, therefore, they were deemed inappropriate for conversations in the organisational context. Given their inappropriate nature, these types of questions from one employee to another could lead to harassment and disciplinary issues within an organisation. They may also cause a disruptive organisational climate and/or culture.

Besides the overt sexual comments, there were also examples of a colleague asking gay individuals personal questions linked to things that were equated with a heterosexual relationship, such as, marital status, marriage, children, *etc.* It was deduced that heterosexual colleagues might be trying to fit the relationship of gay colleagues into the same frame of reference (heterosexual) from which they operate in terms of relationships. This was in direct alignment with the work covered on symbolic interactionism and the social construction of reality in Chapter 2, particularly regarding the way in which certain symbols were socially constructed and had meaning for individuals, based on personal perceptions and social constructs, in this case, the heteronormative constructs of marriage, children, family, *etc.*

Although aspects related to religion were raised in various sub-themes, in the context of re-communication it came up in terms of negative re-communication, where colleagues sometimes used religion as a way of trying to convince a participant that being gay was a sin.

While meaningful relationships in the organisation were predominantly identified as an element that motivated disclosure, it could also discourage disclosure. Some participants displayed a real concern for losing meaningful relationships, if they disclosed their sexual identity as gay. They indicated that they believed revealing their sexual identity to a colleague could put their friendship at risk. As such, the re-communication post-disclosure could lead to **social isolation**. In light of this, a risk versus cost benefit assessment, as outlined in the social penetration theory in Chapter 3, would be conducted by the gay individual.

The fear of loss that disclosure may bring, such as, the harm it could cause to a relationship or the possible influence it could have on being promoted, was also found to discourage disclosure of sexual identity. In the data analysis, it became apparent that social isolation and fear of losing meaningful relationships were expressed as a form of

anxiety for participants. It was noted that, although gay individuals' fear for of losing their jobs may not be as much of a concern as it was in previous years, there was evidence illustrating that the fear of being rejected and socially isolated remained a factor for discouraging disclosure. Some gay individuals may still have fears from their own or other's previous experiences, even though times have changed.

Based on the responses of participants, it was argued that, when a colleague's response post-disclosure lead to negative re-communication, then the interaction behaviour between the participant and that colleague was less of a meaningful interaction, which lead to **less meaningful communication**. This was usually based on one or more of the elements that influenced disclosure or non-disclosure discussed in Chapter 5, such as, but not limited to, colleagues with conservative or narrow ideologies, and those whom the participants perceived as being derogatory, judgemental, prejudiced and/or discriminatory towards gay individuals. These lead participants to continue avoiding disclosure, concealing their sexual identity or delaying disclosure. It was found that this could limit truthful interaction behaviour. At times, disclosure resulted in uncomfortable interactions between participants and colleagues post-disclosure and this hampered any form of meaningful communication.

The responses of participants demonstrated that there were times when colleagues generalised views about a specific category, in this case the **stereotyping** of gay individuals. The predominant stereotyping extrapolated from the data was linked to physical appearances, when colleagues did or did not believe participants fitted the stereotypical and socially constructed views of what gay people present aesthetically. In juxtaposition, there were examples where colleagues stereotyped the participants. Stereotypes in the organisation may lead to the emergence of an organisational climate and/or culture rife with discrimination related to preconceived stereotypes of that group – in this case gay individuals. Stereotyping not only affected an individual's self-esteem, it also influences negatively on productivity and could lead to a limitation in organisational interactions. It was also posited that this could lead to a non-inclusive and disruptive organisational climate and/or culture, as discussed in Chapter 3. It may affect staff turnover, absenteeism, a belief that there are no promotional opportunities if an individual is not a certain way and employee perceptions on bias. In a culture rife with perpetuating stereotypes, there may even be signs of stress amongst employees.

Based on the responses analysed, **offensive or inappropriate humour** became a form of negative communication in the following three possible ways: (i) participants disclosing their sexual identity using humour; (ii) when a colleague made jokes about gay individuals, it resulted in the participant disclosing his/her sexual identity; and (iii) when the post-disclosure communication between participants and a colleague included continual jokes or mockery related to gay individuals.

Sub-goal: Provide a thick description of the re-communication phenomenon

This sub-goal was achieved in the sense that the identified themes constituting the re-communication conceptual framework were discussed in great depth in Chapters 5 and 6 through description of the various elements that encouraged and discouraged disclosure, the self-preservation communication strategies, the actual reality-altering event and the subsequent re-communication, which either became more or less meaningful.

Sub-goal: Identify the different communication strategies and interaction behaviour used by gay individuals during the various stages of the re-communication process within their organisational contexts

This goal was achieved by means of a thematic textual analysis. Two of the dominant themes revealed two overall types of communication, which were identified. Firstly, self-preservation communication strategies, which were the strategies that gay individuals used when they were still deciding whether or how they would reveal their sexual identity to colleagues as gay within their organisational contexts. The second set of communication was the communication that leads to the disclosure of a gay individual's sexual identity as gay in the organisation, which could occur either by means of the gay individual strategically or spontaneously communicating this information, or by an external person or individual disclosing the fact that the individual is gay.

7.6.2.3 Self-preservation communication strategies

The self-preservation communication strategies are represented in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3: Self-preservation communication strategies

This section is focused on the self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosing or concealing the reality-altering event. The next three strategies were the themes that emerged out of the data as possible self-preservation communication strategies individuals may have used to avoid disclosure and/or conceal their sexual identity: avoidance strategies, personal pronoun game and non-conforming strategies.

There were multiple examples in which gay individuals utilised **avoidance strategies,** so as not to disclose their sexual identity. This theme included any elements that demonstrated gay individuals' avoidance of disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague. Examples included, but were not limited to, gay individuals avoiding discussions about personal information with their colleagues, or avoiding or deflecting questions about their personal lives. This also included gay individuals avoiding or concealing being gay; being selective about to whom they chose to disclose; or only telling half-truths – even lying – about the fact that they were gay, even if only for a short period. As defined in this context, lies of commission would be telling someone something that was not true, or twisting the truth into something that suites an individual. There was evidence of this type of lying being used as a self-preservation communication strategy.

In contrast, a lie of omission, as defined in this context, involves leaving something important out of a statement, which some participants did. Participants may have decided to use either a lie of commission or omission to a colleague about their sexual identity to avoid the perceived judgment they deemed that they might have experienced if they disclosed their sexual identity as gay. This could be considered as a protection mechanism, so that a gay individual did not have to disclose his/her sexual identity. In some instances, the participants lied to someone whom they did not know well, or with whom they did not share a friendship or close bond. However, in other instances, the participants lied to someone with whom they were friends. Sometimes participants explained that they did not utilise a lie of commission, but rather a lie of omission, e.g. calling a partner a friend. These acts of inferring that a partner was merely a friend seemed to be a way of neutralising disclosure. They were juxtaposed by some participants saying that they would not lie and say a partner is a friend, but they would also not just share the truth.

Some participants shared a more physical type of avoidance, namely, when they physically left the environment or made excuses to leave when any conversations of a personal nature came up that may force them to disclose their sexual identity. Some participants indicated that they simply left the setting physically, or they would make an excuse to leave if interaction behaviour of a personal nature came up.

In collocation to the more extreme forms of avoidance strategies, there were times when participants themselves were selective about to whom they disclosed their sexual identity in the organisation, for various reasons, such as risk of loss of income, because the person to whom they were disclosing was, for example, a client, someone the gay individual perceived as judgemental, *etc.* This was considered a deliberate attempt to be selective, based on the characteristics the gay individual believed a colleague or colleagues possessed. Some participants avoided disclosure because they seemed to imply that they, at times, felt ill equipped socially, emotionally or psychologically to disclose their sexual identity.

A theme that came out extensively in the data analysis was the way in which participants would use **gender neutral personal pronouns,** such as ‘”we”, “they” and “us”, when speaking about their personal lives, so that people would not know that they are gay. Therefore, this theme included any elements that demonstrated participants’ use of

personal pronouns when referring to a partner or a prospective partner prior to disclosure of their sexual identity, in order to avoid colleagues knowing the gender of their partner. The two gender neutral terms that were mentioned a number of times when referring to a partner were “us” and “we”. The theme also included the use of strategic communication in interpersonal communication, because, as argued in Chapter 3, the communication is planned, purposeful and symbolic. In this case, it is the planned and purposeful use of gender-neutral words to refer to a partner, such as, “partner” or “my other half”, as opposed to husband/ wife or boyfriend/girlfriend.

The theme of **non-conforming strategies** are elements that demonstrated gay individuals’ non-conformity to disclosure of their sexual identity because of working in a heteronormative environment. Non-conformity strategies were linked to heteronormativity and how, in a heteronormative dominant society, gay people may feel that they are compelled to disclose their sexual identity, whereas heterosexual people do not have to disclose that they are heterosexual. As indicated in Chapter 3, Robinson (2017) explained, “Heteronormativity is a hegemonic social system of norms, discourses, and practices that construct heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality. Heteronormativity is based on a dichotomous understanding of complementary gender roles, and a belief that sexual relations should be relegated entirely to the private sphere. Homonormativity, then, refers to the belief that sexual minorities can and should conform to heteronormative institutions and more in order to achieve greater acceptance into dominant society”.

Numerous participants’ quotations addressed the concept of heteronormativity, even though they did not necessarily use this term. It was actually the inverse – a type of defiance that heterosexual people do not have to feel pressure to share and disclose personal information, with the question being, why do gay people have to conform. The participants co-construct social realities with each of their colleagues. The participants’ interaction behaviour with each of these colleagues was based on participants’ perceptions and the meaning that the participants ascribed to the communication behaviour that they shared with each of their colleagues, as well as the participants’ perceptions of their colleagues’ possible reactions to the disclosure of their sexual identity. Language, meaning and the way in which individuals use language to exchange meaning and, in turn, co-construct social reality, were deemed significant, because social reality in the context of symbolic interactionism is a set of social constructs. Each time

the participant interacted with his/her colleagues, meaning was exchanged and or shared meaning increased. Many of the participants in this study stated that they did not feel that they should have to use language that implied that they were gay to disclose, because heterosexual people did not have to do so.

From the self-preservation communication strategies, it was evident that, when gay individuals were avoiding disclosing or concealing the reality-altering event, elements occurred of participants feeling awkward and uncomfortable, primarily because they operate in a heteronormative environment. It was almost a position of feeling as if being gay had some sort of stigma attached to it. Because some of their colleagues might react negatively, based on their beliefs and worldviews, some participants took the position of avoiding disclosure until they had more certainty that it would be “safe” to disclose their sexual identity. However, most of the participants expressed a feeling of defiance as to why they should feel this way, because heterosexual people do not have to disclose. Yet, if a participant did not disclose, colleagues often felt hurt or betrayed that the participant did not trust him/her enough to disclose. This, in turn, could have caused strain in the professional interaction behaviour.

Although gay individuals may use other self-preservation communication strategies, the participants in this research used those outlined in foregoing themes and sub-themes. The key findings indicated that the amount of time that gay individuals used engaging in self-preservation communication strategies might differ, depending on how open the gay individual was and/or how comfortable s/he felt with a given colleague. However, regardless of how long the participants engaged in self-preservation communication strategies, all the participants, even if for a moment, used a self-preservation communication strategy, which was either based on the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure, or based on a decision not to avoid disclosing their sexual identity. If someone else discloses the gay individual’s sexual identity, this disclosure became the reality-altering event in this context.

7.6.2.4 Reality-altering event

As specified, the study focused on how, in any reality-altering event, either strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised by the gay individual or someone external to the gay individual to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people, which in this case is the disclosure of someone’s sexual identity as gay.

Figure 7.4: Reality-altering event

It was found that this information could be communicated either by the individual who experienced a reality-altering event or persons or forms of communication external to the individual. Within the context of this study, the disclosure, then, became the reality-altering event, which in this case was when a gay individual's sexual identity of being gay was disclosed to colleagues. In this dominant theme, three ways were identified in which the reality-altering event of disclosure of sexual identity occurred. Firstly, **communication disclosure strategies,** which involves the communication linked to the disclosure of the gay individual's sexual identity being planned, monitored and executed under the control of the gay individual him/herself. Secondly, there are spontaneous forms of communication disclosure, which are used when the disclosure of a gay individual's sexual identity occurs in a more spontaneous way. In other words, the disclosure is less planned. This disclosure is still meted out by the gay individuals themselves, but not strategically. Thirdly, there are times when the locus of control of disclosure is outside of the control of the gay individual, because the disclosure has been externally controlled by someone other than the gay individual, e.g. a colleague disclosing the gay individual's sexual identity.

There were two broad themes identified, of which the first is **defiance**. Defiance was not a strategy used by many of the participants. A form of defiance that was extrapolated from the data occurred when the way in which the participants disclosed their sexual identity was brazen or bold, or included the use of shock tactics. In other words, when participants disclosed their sexual identity to a colleague by eliciting some form of shock. It is important to note that defiance was only a communication strategy when it was a planned and considered disclosure technique. If it were spontaneous, it would have formed part of the sub-theme of “it just happened”.

The second communication disclosure strategy was **strategic leading and communication**. This theme included elements of participants hinting to a colleague that they were gay. It involved gay individuals strategically communicating in such a way that lead a colleague to ask the gay individual questions, resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity. One of the examples depicted how the participant relayed a story, as if those listening should know he was speaking about a love interest and, if people did not notice the hinting, he would pose it as a rhetorical question, for example, “You know we are dating right?”

At times, the strategic leading was explained by participants as a purposeful way to illicit or prompt questions, so that they strategically got someone to ask about their sexuality, thereby providing them with an opportunity to disclose. In one of the examples, the participants did indicate that strategic leading did not always lead to immediate disclosure, as sometimes the conversation was stopped when the colleague did not ask follow-up questions.

Another element of strategic leading and communication was gay individuals working their partners’ names into a conversation, as if the colleague with whom they were communicating should know who that was. This would generally result in a colleague asking who the person was to whom the participant was referring, and/or feeling too awkward to question, thereby connecting what the gay individual was implying from the interaction behaviour. Another participant explained how he skirted around the issue of being gay by referring to his partner or his friend. Shifting slightly from the previous point, where the gay individual specifically used his/her partners name to prompt disclosure, some participants expressed that they would discuss their partner or sexual preference in the company of colleagues who already knew they were gay, with the purposeful or

sub-conscious intention of those around them overhearing this. When this was purposeful, it directly linked to the definition of strategic communication as a purposeful and planned form of communication, as expounded in Chapter 3. One of the participants, for example, shared her wedding album with colleagues, who knew she was gay and, in this process, another colleague established that the individual was gay.

The next aspect of strategic leading and strategic communication was when gay individuals opted to **use a work event** as an opportunity to strategically hint at their sexual identity by bringing their partner to the event.

An interesting type of disclosure mentioned by one participant was the way in which he used **storytelling** to disclose his sexual identity. In his position in management training, this participant understood the importance of storytelling. This allowed him to use storytelling as an effective tool for his job and, as defined in Chapter 3, professional identity is a construct. Therefore, he selected storytelling as a means of incorporating not only his professional skill, but also a means to disclose his sexual identity. Storytelling is considered as an effective way of sharing experiences and today it is used more frequently in organisations.

Interestingly, **social media** have also become a tool with which people get to know one another and/or about colleagues. Even the human resource management departments of organisations often evaluate a colleague's social media profiles. One or two of the participants explained how social media had made them more open, as it is a public way of disclosing. Although it is a personal platform and social media pages should be monitored, it can be used as a strategic tool to hint at disclosure, but also for professionalism. This type of disclosure would be strategic, because the gay individual controlled what s/he placed on these platforms and the image that was portrayed about him/her. One participant explained how a client found out he was gay when he saw his wedding photos on Facebook. One participant cautioned about whom one allows as a connection on Facebook, possibly because she was aware that this would lead to disclosure, which, in her case, it did. It also indicates a strategy involved in selecting some colleagues over others, which could be because for gay individuals' they are cognisant that, if they accept someone on Facebook as a friend, then their sexual identity would be publicly displayed and that colleague would see this intimate aspect of the gay individual's life.

Once communication strategies have been utilised for disclosure and a colleague knows that an individual is gay, based on one of the afore-mentioned or any other form of disclosure, it was argued that there was an alteration in the co-constructed social reality of the participants and their colleague. The alternation involved the colleagues going from a position of not knowing or not being sure of the participant being gay to a position of knowing. Based on the alteration, it was found that it does, in some way, alter the co-constructed social reality and also the interaction behaviour between the participants and their colleagues, even if it is only slightly – e.g. referring to a participant's partner by name instead of calling him/her a partner.

Secondly, disclosure at times happened spontaneously. There were two broad themes of spontaneous communication. The first broad theme of spontaneous communication was a **defensive reaction to ridicule**. This included sub-themes of participants feeling prompted to disclose their sexual identity after a colleague had made a derogatory comment or was displaying derogatory behaviour about gay individuals in their presence. One of the sub-themes was colleagues using derogatory language about gay individuals in their organisational contexts, thereby, prompting the gay individuals to disclose that they are gay in order to defend gay people.

From the interactions with the participants, it was possible to deduce that, besides the interpersonal and human concerns related to speaking about others in a derogatory manner, the fact that these comments were made in an organisational context exacerbated matters. Not only was this behaviour socially unacceptable within an organisational context and could negatively influence interaction behaviour, it could also lead to multiple human resource management concerns, a breakdown in communication and teamwork, policy breaches and even disciplinary action leading to possible declines in productivity, efficiency and teamwork. Therefore, organisations need to sensitise staff to interactions and professional communication and act on inappropriate behaviour in the organisational context. This supports the argument that professional communication is one of the pillars of an organisation and ineffective or poor communication may affect organisational performance.

There were also examples of the derogatory behaviour being meted out by the participant's senior and/or line manager. This was noted as an even more complex organisational concern, because it might lead to disciplinary concerns and the line

manager could be accused of constructive dismissal and/or making the organisational context unworkable for the gay individual.

There were times when the participants could not locate how disclosure had taken place and they expressed how it **"just happened".** This demonstrated that the disclosure of sexual identity could occur with no specific form of communication disclosure or no recollection of disclosure events. Instead, participants' sexual identity was disclosed in the course of everyday conversations between themselves and their colleagues, or a colleague pieced it together, based on interactions with the participant. This theme was also categorised by participants having no physical recollection of how their sexual identity was disclosed or just disclosing this information spontaneously, rather than using a specific communication strategy.

Finally, it was noted that, at times, the disclosure was out of the gay individual's control, because disclosure came from an external source. Two broad themes were identified as part of externally controlled disclosure – being "outed" by others and direct questioning. At times, participants reported on their sexual identity being either purposefully disclosed by other colleagues, or disclosed accidentally by colleagues and, in this way, they were essentially **"outed" by others**. One example of this was if colleagues found out about participants' sexual identity via rumour, gossip or grapevine communication, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In other cases, the participants were made aware that a colleague knew they were gay, or a colleague thought other colleagues knew that they were gay and said something about the individual being gay. However, it came to the fore that the other colleagues actually did not know the individual was gay. This type of disclosure was directly linked to the conjectures discussed in Chapter 3, about grapevine communication in organisations. In this case, disclosure was disseminated via an unorganised, unofficial and informal organisational dialogue that did not follow the regular structures of organisational communication.

When a colleague disclosed to other colleagues that an individual was gay, it was in some cases an intentional act, such as gossip or spreading rumours. However, in some cases, it was unintentional disclosure, where the colleague thought someone else actually knew that the individual was gay. Even if unintentional, it could, at times still be negative for the gay individual and/or insensitive towards them, because rumour or gossip still caused discomfort. When a colleague intentionally disclosed that a colleague

is gay, or started a rumour, this type of grapevine communication can be considered hurtful and it may lead to a decline in organisational relationships, thereby negatively affecting the organisational climate and/or culture. A number of participants did raise that they believed some colleagues had found out they were gay via rumour. Gossip and rumour are negative forms of organisational communication, confirming the theoretical discussion in Chapter 3, and they can create a non-cooperative environment that can foster a negative organisational climate and/or culture.

At times, participants explained how they only disclosed their sexual identity, if they were directly asked questions about their sexual identity by a colleague. Once disclosure had taken place and a colleague knew that an individual was gay, based on one of the aforementioned or any other forms of disclosure, it was argued that there was an alteration in the co-constructed social reality between the participants and their colleagues, because they went from a position of not knowing or not being sure the participants were gay to knowing. It is posited that, whether the colleagues communicated in a positive, negative or neutral way with the gay individual post-disclosure, in some way, the disclosure does alter the co-constructed social reality and the interaction behaviour between the participants and their colleagues. The alteration occurs, even if it is only a slight alteration, such as, for example, referring to the participants' partners by name, instead of calling them a partner.

7.7 Developing the re-communication conceptual framework

Because of its penchant to illustrate how variables interconnect and dissect with one another, a conceptual framework was developed for re-communication. Jabareen (2009:51) defines a *conceptual framework* as "…a network, or 'a plane' of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena. The concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a conceptual framework-specific philosophy. Conceptual frameworks possess ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, and each concept within a conceptual framework plays an ontological or epistemological role". It is proposed that the theoretical and applied findings of this study align with the characteristics of a conceptual framework.

Out of the open, axial and selective coding, the data was interrogated for trends and patterns. From the concepts that were extrapolated out of the open coding, these were

refined via axial and again through selective coding to narrow the patterns and trends down to four dominant themes.

It was proposed that a reality-altering event initially happens to an individual in his/her own personal reality. Examples of reality-altering events are someone realising s/he is gay; finding out s/he is HIV positive; being diagnosed with a terminal illness; being raped; finding out s/he is adopted; the death of a loved one; having a child, to name but a few. Whilst s/he is processing this reality-altering event, it is his/hers alone. However, the moment that the individual makes the decision to reveal his/her reality-altering event to someone else, this disclosure is, in itself, a secondary reality-altering event. It is in the disclosure of this reality-altering event that the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour becomes evident and the disclosure aspect of the reality-altering event and the influence of disclosure on interaction behaviour is at the core of the conceptual framework of re-communication. In the context of this study, the reality-altering event was the disclosure of an individual's sexual identity as gay to his/her colleagues in an organisation, but it is envisioned that the dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework developed for this study could be applied to other reality-altering events.

As was established, the re-communication conceptual framework was based on the dominant themes, broad themes and sub-themes that emerged from the coding of the thematic textual analysis and based on the data provided by the participants in the in-depth semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry. It was proposed that individuals who are contemplating whether they wish to disclose their sexual identity to colleagues were influenced by various elements, some of which related to the environment itself, such as the physical location in which a gay individual finds him/herself. In some areas or regions, for example, it was considered a higher risk to disclose one's sexual identity as gay. The other environmental element that emerged was that the organisational identity in which each participant was working, where some organisations had policies and practices in place that encouraged disclosure, whereas others had no policies in place, or further yet some had policies, but they were not "lived out" by management and staff. The other two elements that emerged related to the individual colleagues and characteristics of the colleagues with whom the participants came into contact, such as their attitudes and behaviour; how meaningful their relationships were with the gay

individuals; if they had conservative ideologies, amongst others. These were grouped together as either disclosure motivators or detractors.

Taking the elements influencing disclosure into account, the gay individuals are at a cross roads with each colleague, in that they need to decide if they wish to use communication strategies to conceal their sexual identity to a specific colleague, or use communication strategies to disclose their sexual identity as gay. It was noted that, at times, the participants used communication strategies to conceal their identity, while they were still deciding if or how they would disclose.

The self-preservation communication strategies were strategic in nature, because they required planning and they are a deliberate attempt not to reveal this specific information. Once the gay individual has decided if or how s/he will or will not disclose, s/he then either employed self-preservation communication strategies to continue not revealing his/her sexual identity to colleagues, or employed communication strategies or spontaneous communication to disclose. If the gay individual decided s/he did not intend disclosing at a given time, then the re-communication process did not proceed, until such time that s/he decided to disclose his/her sexual identity and/or if someone else caused the reality-altering event (disclosure), such as the gay individual being “outed” by others.

Once the gay individual was forced to disclose or voluntarily decided to disclose, the re-communication process moved from the self-preservation communication stage, in which the gay individual’s sexual identity was either concealed or disclosure was avoided, to the communication disclosure stage.

Figure 7.5 presents the three dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework.

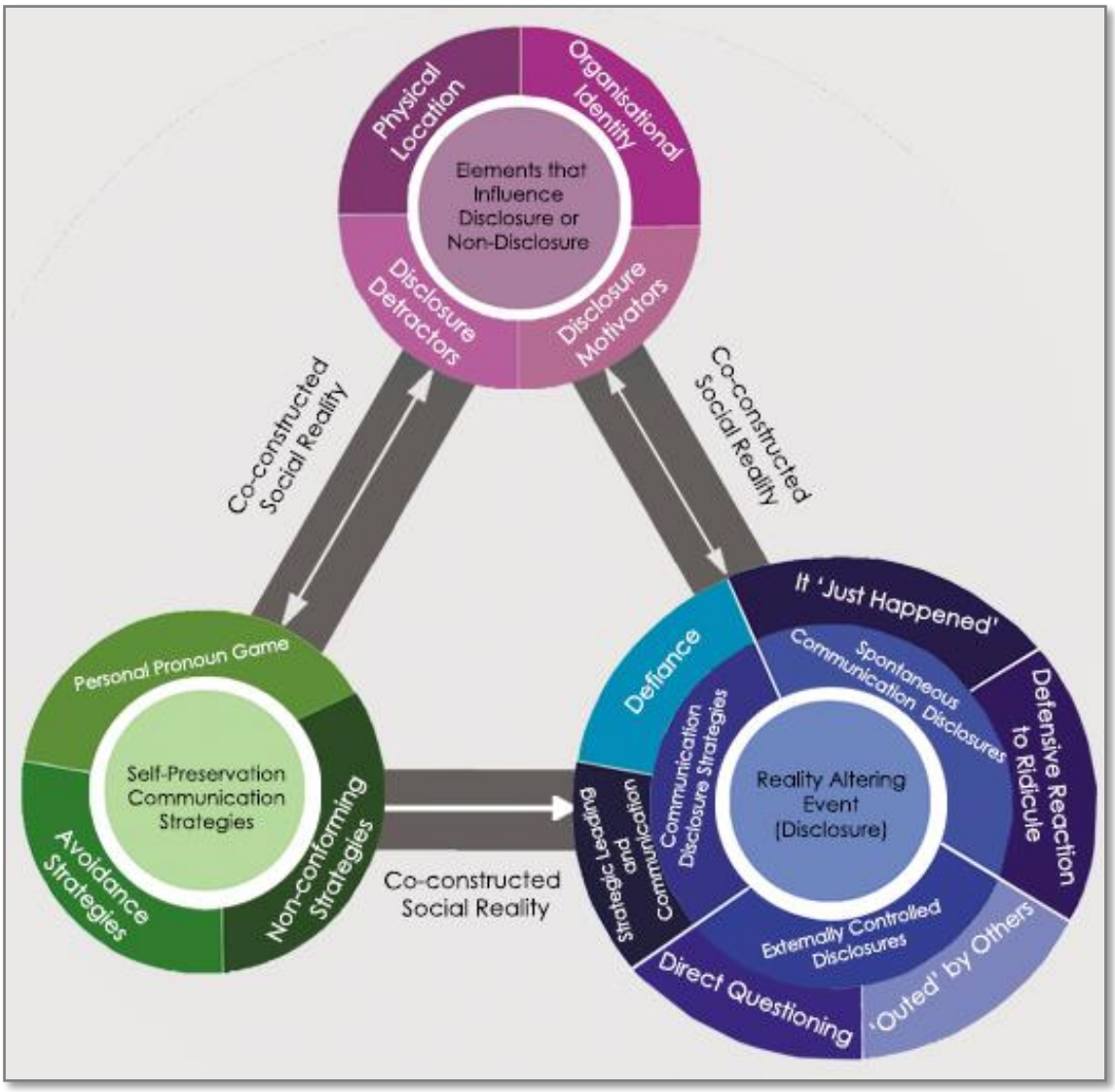


Figure 7.5: Three dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework

In Figure 7.5, the inner circle of the re-communication conceptual framework goes through three of the dominant themes: (i) elements that influence disclosure or non-disclosure; (ii) self-preservation communication strategies; and (iii) the reality-altering event. These themes are represented as a triangle to show the cross roads at which the individual is exposed to the various elements of influence. The two-sided arrows represent the back and forth process of individuals engaging with different colleagues. For example, a gay individual may decide to disclose to one colleague immediately, based on various elements and may decide to conceal to another. The image draws attention to the fact that, throughout this process, gay individuals' decisions are influenced by the co-constructed social realities that they share with a specific colleague.

There is only a single sided arrow running horizontally from self-preservation communication strategies to the communication used for disclosure, because, once the disclosure has occurred, the gay individual cannot go back to self-preservation communication strategies with that specific individual. At this point, the co-constructed social reality between the gay individual and the colleague to whom s/he has disclosed has been altered from a position of not knowing the individual is gay to knowing.

Once disclosure has occurred, two things are proposed to occur. Firstly, there is an alteration in interaction behaviour, no matter how small and, even if the participants reported no evident change in the interaction behaviour, it was still considered positive. What emerged was that the alteration of interaction behaviour leads either to more or to less meaningful communication between the gay individual and his/her colleagues to whom s/he disclosed. For many participants, the disclosure led to more open and spontaneous communication that did not have to be monitored. Participants expressed a sense of relief speaking about their personal lives after disclosure and having a fully inclusive work environment. In some instances, the disclosure led to a less meaningful relationship, derogatory comments being passed and, in extreme (limited) cases, social isolation.

This altered form of communication between the gay individual and the colleagues to whom s/he has disclosed is identified, explained and labelled as *re-communication.* The term *re-communication* was used because of the way in which the gay individual and his/her colleague had to alter their communication and communicate differently in an altered co-constructed social reality.

Figure 7.6 presents a diagram of the final re-communication conceptual framework that emerged from the findings and results of the study.

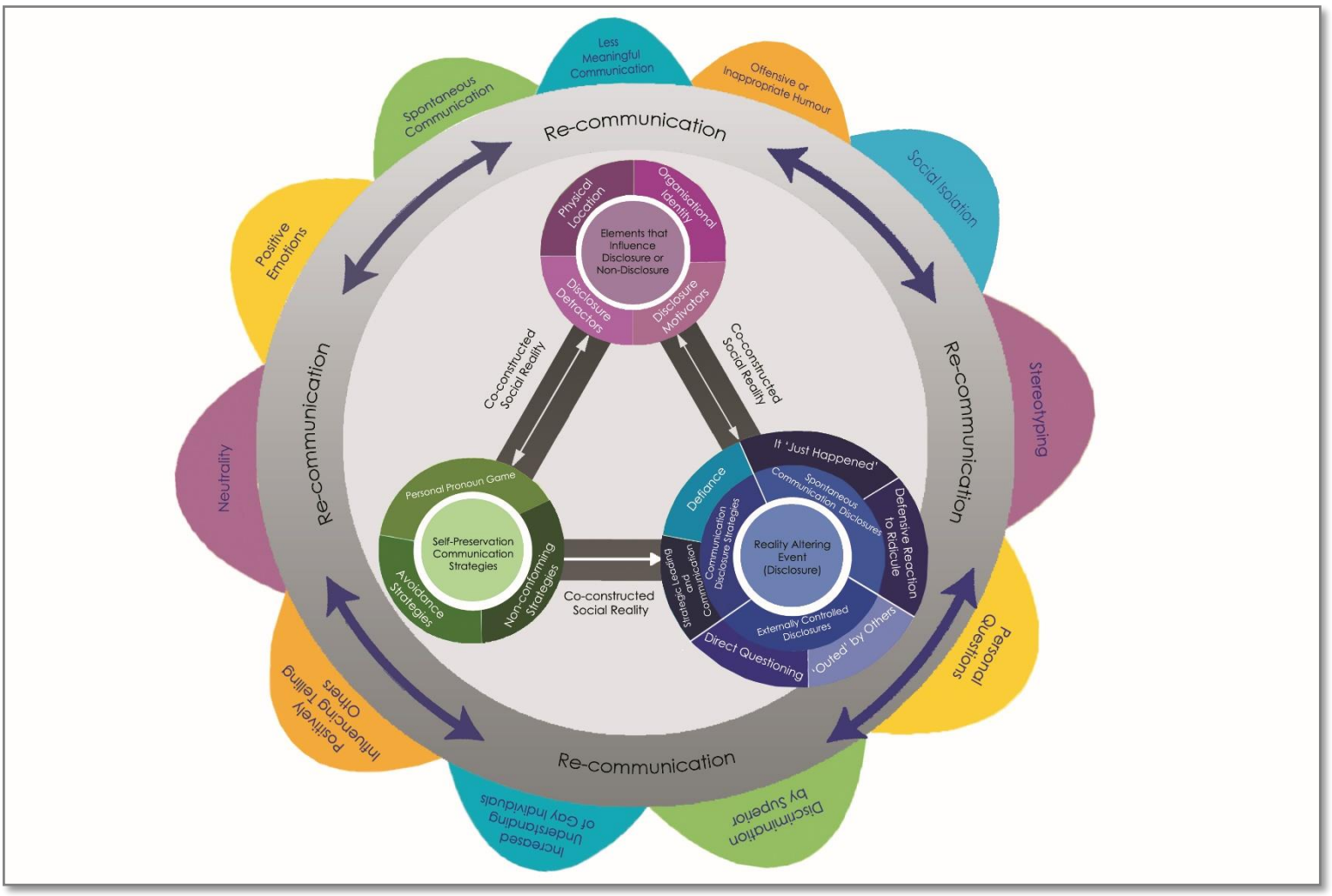


Figure 7.6: Re-communication conceptual framework

In Figure 7.6, re-communication encircles the entire process, because it is the essence of this re-communication conceptual framework, namely the influence of a reality-altering event on re-communication. Each of the elements of re-communication that emerged as broad themes from the data analysis is represented surrounding the re-communication. Double sided arrows were included to depict the fact that re-communication is an evolving process.

7.8 Limitations

Regardless of the rigour utilised to develop a qualitative research design, qualitative research with its smaller sample size and non-probability sampling always has the limitation of not being generalisable or having external validity. This study relied on a

small, purposive sample and, therefore the data collected and analysed is utilisable for gaining insights, in depth understanding and possible guidelines – not state or test re-communication in the conclusive sense.

A secondary limitation is that the study underutilised the population and did not stratify the sample, given that purposive non-probability sampling was used. Although there was, for the most part, a balanced relation between gay men and gay women, other biographical information, such as race, culture and religion, were not taken into account. Comparing these elements might have added additional depth to the study. A future study may look at using a more diverse sample and adding additional depth and insights to the way in which race, culture and/or religion may also influence the disclosure of reality-altering events. However, it should be noted that the aim of this study was not to generalise results or analyse the data in terms of gender, race, religion, *etc.,* but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of the types of communication utilised prior and during a reality-altering event and the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour in an organisational context.

The researcher has had personal experience with this topic and, therefore, it is noted that this may have influenced the study. For example, the initial questions might have been based on those insights. However, the co-coder's trustworthiness and the insights provided by participants increased the trustworthiness.

This is a perception-based study and, therefore, data was self-reported and conclusions and causality could not be determined. The literature and theoretical foundation afforded the researcher a broad context and suggestions were made about the potential influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour between colleagues in the organisations. The influence of the type of organisational climates and/or cultures also have an influence on whether an individual feels if the context is safe for disclosure.

Despite potential limitations, these findings have significant meaning for understanding the possible influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour in an organisational context and in this case specifically on the disclosure of sexual identity. However, in the absence of replication and due to the relatively small sample size and non-representative sample, the findings need to be interpreted with restraint.

7.9 Heuristic value and suggestions for further research

The heuristic value of this study is that the re-communication phenomenon and framework can be applied to other contexts.

The proposed study has value, because it provides insight into the perceived elements that influence gay individuals to disclose or to avoid disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague, the communication strategies that gay individuals use within organisational contexts to do so, as well as the various forms of communication utilised to reveal an individual's sexual identity within the organisational context. More importantly, as far as the researcher could establish, there is currently no existing literature that describes the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour. Therefore, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of re-communication. It is purported that the re-communication conceptual framework and communication strategies can also be applied to other reality-altering events.

Future studies may consider the following areas of interest:

- Gay individuals' race and culture as elements that may have an influence on their disclosure process and decisions;
- An evaluation of the reasons for the cultural complexity of disclosure in rural areas and in many parts of the African continent;
- Other reality-altering events – not just disclosure of sexual identity – in the organisational context;
- The impact of disclosing in the vernacular versus the reality of many in South Africa, who disclose in their second or even third languages; and
- The psychological aspects of this study.

Future researchers may consider refining the existing themes and sub-themes identified in this study and consider alternative variables that could influence disclosure and non-disclosure, as well as a more exhaustive list of communication strategies for self-preservation and communication for disclosure. Further studies could also analyse specific organisational contexts and/or a broader scope of organisational contexts.

Further studies could pay more attention (in both literature and research) to previous research on receivers' perceptions of a reality-altering message to justify the identification of disclosure motivators and disclosure detractors. It was not part of the scope of this study.

7.10 Contributions of the study

The most significant contribution of the study is identifying, explaining and labelling a previously unexplored communication phenomenon, that of re-communication, as well as the development of a conceptual framework for re-communication that could contribute to society and organisational realities in a two-fold manner.

Firstly, to give insights to gay individuals of the experiences of others, which may assist them in their own disclosure process. Secondly, the outcome illustrates the importance of these disclosure experiences towards building organisational climates and/or cultures and the concomitant impact of the way in which prolonged cooperative engagements result in healthy organisational practices, such as inclusive climates, employee loyalty, improved team cooperation, trust among employees, increased employee wellbeing and more effective communication processes within the organisation.

Although there are several theories related to the social construction of reality, interaction behaviour, disclosure and social cognition, these theories do not provide in-depth insight into the influence of reality-altering events on interaction behaviour with colleagues and co-constructed social realities. Therefore, this study is relevant, in that it provides insight into the perceived factors that influence gay individuals' to disclosure or avoidance of disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues. These factors also affect the self-preservation communication strategies that gay individuals use when they are still preserving disclosure of their sexual identity, as well as the communication that is used to illicit disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues. More importantly, there is currently no existing literature that describes the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour or the term *re-communication*. An in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of re-communication is provided in this study. It is purported that the dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework can also be applied to other reality-altering events. Some of the sub-themes may be transferable but, for the most part, they specifically apply to gay individuals.

Moreover, the study could contribute to individuals experiencing reality-altering events by aiding them in understanding and navigating the communication process of sharing their reality-altering event with others, and the resultant influence this may have on their interaction behaviour, particularly with those with whom they share their sexual identity as gay. It is posited that a reality-altering event can be deeply personal and influence people on an individual level, such as being diagnosed with a terminal illness, coming to terms with being gay, getting divorced, dealing with the death of a loved one, being sexually abused, being raped, *etc.* As soon as an individual discloses his/her reality-altering event, it becomes another reality-altering event – that of disclosure. As disclosure occurs, the co-constructed social reality between the individual disclosing and those to whom s/he discloses is altered from a position of not knowing to knowing about this individual's reality-altering event. This, in turn, may influence the interaction behaviour between the individual experiencing the reality-altering event and those to whom they disclose, thereby influencing their communication. This influence on communication and learning to communicate again in an altered co-constructed social reality is the phenomenon identified, explained and labelled in this study, namely re-communication.

By naming a previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled communication phenomenon, this study thus contributes to the field of Communication Science. It also provides thick descriptions of and an in-depth understanding into the elements influencing disclosure or non-disclosure and the communication strategies involved in the stage where individuals are still concealing their sexual identity, deciding if or how they should disclose, as well as the communication used during disclosure. By providing thick descriptions and an in-depth understanding, a re-communication conceptual framework is realised to garner a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of re-communication.

This study also has the potential of providing insights into creating more inclusive organisational climates and/or cultures that are conducive to open and effective organisational communication in relation to disclosure of personal information in the organisation. As was established, more inclusive organisational climates and/or cultures and prolonged cooperative engagements are considered to foster better organisational contexts that promote honesty, trust, tolerance, improved mental wellbeing and also a

greater willingness of gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity at work (Bergman *et al* 2016:533–535; Eddy & Rumens 2017:112).

Psychology specialists, those involved in counselling, and communication practitioners could draw on the insights provided in this study in their professional practises, when individuals have a fear of reality-altering events, a fear of interacting about their reality-altering events, or are trying to improve internal communication and brand affinity within the organisation. This knowledge and these insights will benefit the discipline of Communication Science and the field of Organisational Communication.

7.11 Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour (communication) in the organisational context. This communication phenomenon was referred to as *re-communication*. In order to explore this phenomenon, the study focused on the re-communication between gay individuals and their colleagues after the gay individuals had disclosed their sexual identity. However, although gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity was the case study, it is purported that re-communication and the dominant themes of the re-communication conceptual framework could be applied to other reality-altering events and the disclosure of these reality-altering events could be relevant in varied contexts. – Ultimately, it was positioned that people co-construct social realities in all contexts, and the disclosure of a reality-altering event could influence communication in varied contexts, with varied reality-altering events. Therefore, the theoretical underpinning focused on social construction of co-constructed social realities and the interaction behaviour of individuals as applied to symbolic interactionism. A further purpose of the study was to develop a re-communication conceptual framework that explained the re-communication phenomenon.

In order to explain the unexplored phenomenon of re-communication and to develop a re-communication conceptual framework, the study focused on the way in which strategic or spontaneous communication could be utilised in any reality-altering event to disclose information that would alter the co-constructed social reality between people. This information could be communicated either by the individual experiencing the reality-altering event or by persons or forms of communication external to the individual. In the context of this study, the disclosure became the reality-altering event. The re-

communication conceptual framework, firstly, included elements that influenced disclosure or non-disclosure and, secondly self-preservation communication strategies used to avoid disclosing or concealing the reality-altering event. Thirdly, the framework included the actual reality-altering event, which in this case, was gay individuals' disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues. Lastly, re-communication was explored in the context of the framework, whereby the altered reality resulted in a perceived alteration in communication after disclosure. It was argued that the co-constructed social reality between a gay individual and a colleague was altered from a position of being unaware of the individual being gay to a position of knowing an individual was gay.

All the theories discussed in the study built on the key areas of the social construction of reality, meaning, language and the symbols used to convey messages. These areas were considered pivotal to creating a greater depth of understanding of the perceived influence of a reality-altering event on interaction behaviour and the alteration of co-constructed social realities between individuals (i.e. colleagues within the organisational context) that emerges after the disclosure of a reality-altering event (i.e. gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity).

From the theories discussed, the researcher posits that gay individuals share individualistic interaction behaviour with each colleague around their sexual identity and co-constructed social realities that are altered post-disclosure. Each of these interactions contributes to the re-construction of the gay individual's co-constructed social reality with every colleague in the organisational context.

The literature that was selected to support this study mainly focused on the notion of disclosure of personal information, such as sexual identity, to colleagues carrying risks within an organisational context. The risk levels are determined by multiple factors, but are influenced by the organisational climate and/or culture in which the gay individual functions, how non-discriminatory the culture and the individual's colleagues are. The less a gay individual feels that it is risky to disclose his/her sexual identity, the more likely s/he is to disclose his/her sexual identity. Gay individuals, who are able to be openly gay in their organisations, without having to face discrimination or social isolation, will generally have a better mental wellbeing, be more productive and satisfied at work and loyal to the organisation. It was argued that identity is constantly in a state of flux and, with each experience, an individual's identity is shared and developed. It was also argued

that the individual experience of organisational acceptance or discrimination and each individual's perceptions of his/her disclosure experience are significant, even if that experience is not real, but rather the gay individual's perception of reality, because that still means it is his/her experience of social reality.

A qualitative design was found to be the most relevant for the purpose of this study. The qualitative design also aligned with the interpretivist paradigm, where one of the strategies of inquiry is phenomenology, which was also the strategy of inquiry used in this study.

A non-probability, purposive sampling technique was utilised and the sample was obtained from friends, colleagues and acquaintances with whom this researcher has had established trusting relationships over a number of years. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, a trust relationship was important and, therefore, such a sampling method was deemed appropriate.

One of the most prominent aspects in the analyses of the findings is that, while each participant decides context-by-context and colleague-by-colleague on the self-preservation communication strategies to use, there are various elements that influence a gay individual to disclose or conceal his/her sexual identity in the organisation. The primary findings indicate that, when participants share a meaningful relationship with a colleague, they are often encouraged to disclose their sexual identity to them to ensure that they could maintain their close relationships. At times, they were actually overridden by a sense of guilt or dissonance for not disclosing to a colleague, particularly when they had formed a meaningful relationship with them. The more a participant trusted a colleague, the more likely they were to disclose. It was colleagues' attitude and behaviour, as perceived by the gay individuals that both encouraged and discouraged disclosure. If the gay individual perceived someone as having a positive and non-judgemental attitude, they were more likely to disclose and, if they had an attitude that perpetuated possible discrimination or negativity towards gay individuals, then participants felt discouraged to disclose.

Fear of rejection and the multifaceted aspects of this theme discouraged disclosure. This was coupled with the perception of culturally conservative and religious people being more difficult to disclose to, as they feared the response and possible rejection from

these colleagues. It was interesting to note that the way in which the organisation was positioned in terms of having a more or less inclusive organisational climate and/or culture, and the policies in place to support this, either made participants feel more or less willing to disclose.

The self-preservation communication strategies were specifically focused on the communication strategies that gay individuals use to interact with colleagues when they were still concealing their sexual identity and while they were deciding if or how they will disclose their sexual identity. The researcher explored the varied ways in which the participants avoided disclosing their sexual identity, from physically leaving a location, to changing the subject and avoiding conversations. Several participants explained that, when they were trying to avoid telling a colleague they were gay, they would often replace their partner's gender with a gender-neutral pronoun.

One of the broad themes that emerged from the data was elements that demonstrated gay individuals' non-conformity to disclosure of their sexual identity because of working in a heteronormative environment.

It was found that the disclosure and subsequent re-communication patterns that occur post-disclosure are unique to each interaction behaviour between gay individuals and colleagues. Sometimes, the disclosure is an individual's control and, when his/her sexual identity is revealed by someone else, it is outside the control of the individual involved.

Due to the complexity of the interaction behaviour and co-constructed social realities between colleagues and the uniqueness of each relationship between the participants and colleagues, the participants need to evaluate the perceived risks and their possible effect/s on their current and future interaction behaviour with a particular colleague. What was clear from the findings was that, in some cases, disclosure lead to a more open and spontaneous interaction behaviour between the participants and colleagues. In other cases, the re-communication became negative and led to less meaningful interaction behaviour between the participants and their colleagues.

The positive re-communication was evidenced as significantly improving the interaction behaviour into more open and spontaneous communication interactions. This could lead to a more positively perceived organisational climate and/or culture and lead the gay

individuals to being more productive and content in their organisational contexts. In juxtaposition, negative re-communication contributes towards a less supportive organisational climate and/or culture. Negative re-communication, particularly by a senior to the employee, may cause an alteration in attitude and behaviour of the gay individuals and, in extreme cases, it may lead to the gay individuals feeling harassed and or taking action against those that have been derogatory to them. If an organisation was perceived as having an unsupportive and disruptive climate or culture, it might have reputational risks and lead to less satisfied employees. Arguable, it is the oscillation between the way colleagues respond to minority groups and the way the organisation deals with such encounters and "lives out" their policies that could lead to a perception about how positive, supportive and conducive an organisation is to gay individuals.

It is posited that, if organisations ensure that their leaders and employees are well positioned to support minority groups and they have strong and well-conceptualised policies that are actually "lived out", then gay individuals will feel more protected and secure in disclosing their sexual identity to colleagues. It is also critical for professionals to maintain their professional identity and to remember that an organisational context is not a place for personal prejudice and relationships and, even if employees do have friendships, their professional identity must be maintained. That having been said, the findings did also illustrate that participants depend on work friendships, close bonds and relationships to consider an organisational context as a happy and engaging space. Re-communication is a form of symbolic interaction and influences the co-creation (construction) and later deconstruction of the co-constructed social reality between gay individuals and their colleagues, before and after the disclosure of their sexual identity, and the perceptions of the disclosure as a positive or a negative experience.

It was put forward that, to establish positive re-communication, the participants needed to perceive their colleagues' responses as positive, or there needed to be a subsequent alteration in the interaction behaviour between the participants and the colleagues to a more spontaneous and open form of communication. Should this not occur, the re-communication leads to less meaningful communication, and/or, in some cases, stereotypical social constructions of gay individuals being perpetuated, and a negative meaning being ascribed to what it means to be gay, it could lead to negative re-communication.

It was found that the disclosure of sexual identity to colleagues is a highly complex event that is influenced by multiple elements. However, what has been established is that participants, for the most part, used self-preservation communication strategies while deciding if and/or how to disclose their sexual identity. It was found that, regardless of how small the influence or how limited the period, the disclosure did influence interaction behaviour and it did alter co-constructed social realities between the participants and their colleagues.

It is concluded that disclosure of a sexual identity or any other reality-altering event is not a single or once off reality-altering event, but a continuous process for gay individuals. Each time a new colleague enters the gay individual's organisational realm, s/he needs to consider if and/or how they want to disclose or not disclose their sexual identity. At times, when a colleague discloses the gay individual's sexual identity to other colleagues, the disclosure will be outside of the gay individual's control.

It is purported that the most significant contribution of the study is the identification, explanation and labelling of a previously unexplored communication phenomenon – that of re-communication – and the development of a re-communication conceptual framework that could contribute to society and organisational realities in a two-fold manner.

Firstly, it provides gay individuals with insight based on the experiences of others, and assists them in making sense of their own disclosure experiences. Secondly, the outcome illustrates the importance of these disclosure experiences in organisational climates and/or cultures and the concomitant impact of prolonged cooperative engagements resulting in healthy organisational practices, such as inclusive climates and cultures for sharing, employee loyalty, improved team cooperation, trust among employees, increased employee wellbeing and more effective communication processes. It is concluded that "while the vast majority of people are heterosexual (i.e. attracted to people of the opposite sex), there are significant numbers who are emotionally and sexually attracted to persons of the same sex (i.e. homosexual) or both sexes (i.e. bisexual). Currently there is a deeply polarized global debate about how society, particularly the law and religion, should deal with this reality" (Sutherland *et al* 2016:9).

Given society's need to be galvanised in dealing with the reality of the experiences of gay individuals, this study is a small step towards casting an awareness on the experiences and perceptions of gay individuals in organisational contexts in South Africa. It provides insight into the meaning of being gay in organisations and the way in which gay individuals preserve themselves against disclosing their sexual identity, the communication leading to the disclosure of their sexual identity and the subsequent re-communication and alteration in the co-constructed social realities between gay individuals and their colleagues. As a society, it is imperative to be cognisant of minority groups and their potential marginalisation and to find ways in the macro societal context and in the microcosm of each organisation to foster more inclusive and cooperative climates and/or cultures that are people-orientated and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual's experience and social reality.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Addo, R. 2018. Homeless individuals' social construction of a park: a symbolic interactionist perspective. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(9):2063–2074. [O]. Available: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss9/3 Accessed on 2019/04/22.

Adu-Oppong, AA & Agyin-Birikorang, E. 2014. Communication in the workplace: guidelines for improving effectiveness. *Global Journal of Commerce and Management Perspectives*, 3(5):208–213.

Ahmed, M & Shafiq, S. 2014. The impact of organizational culture on organizational performance: a case study of telecom sector. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research: (A) Administration and Management*, 14(3):21–29. [O]. Available: https://globaljournals.org/GJMBR_Volume14/4-The-Impact-of-Organizational-Culture.pdf Accessed on 2019/05/24.

Allen, BJ. 2005. Social constructionism, in *Engaging organizational communication theory and research : multiple perspectives,* edited by S May and DK Mumby. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE:35–53. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=467096&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/01/21.

Almeida, F, Faria, D & Queirós, A. 2017. Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods. *European Journal of Education Studies,* 3(9):369–387.

Alparslan, AM & Kılınç, UK. 2015. The power of informal communication and perceived organizational support on energy at work and extra-role behavior: a survey on teachers. *Journal of Human Sciences*, 12(2):113–138. [O]. Available: https://www.j-humansciences.com/ojs/index.php/IJHS/article/view/3243 Accessed on 2019/10/06.

Altman, I & Taylor, DA. 1973. *Social penetration: the development of interpersonal relationships*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Alvesson, M & Skoldberg, K. 2009. *(Post-) positivism, social constructionism, critical realism: three reference points in the philosophy of science*. [O]. Available: http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/28039_02_Alvesson_2e_Ch_02.pdf Accessed on 2012/09/06.

Anderson, ML & Taylor, HF. 2008. *Sociology: understanding a diverse society*. California, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Anderson, ML, Taylor, HF & Logio, KA. 2014. *Sociology: the essentials*. Stanford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Antwi, SK & Hamza, K. 2015. Qualitative and quantitative research paradigms in business research: a philosophical reflection. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 7(3):217–225.

Ashkanasy, NM, & Hartel, CEJ. 2014. Communication, organizational culture and organizational climate, in *The Oxford handbook of organizational climate and culture*, edited by B Schneider & KM Barbera. Oxford: Oxford University Press:136–152.

Ayres, J. 1979. Uncertainty and social penetration theory expectations about relationship communication: a comparative test. *Western Journal of Speech Communication,* 43(3):192–200.

Baak, D, Fogliasso, C & Harris, J. 2000. The personal impact of ethical decisions: a social penetration theory. *Journal of Business Ethics,* 24(1):39–49.

Babbie, E & Mouton, J. 2001. *Practice of social research.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.

Barak, A & Gluck-Ofri, O. 2007. Degree and reciprocity of self-disclosure in online forums. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior,* 10(3):407–417.

Baran, SJ & Davis, DK. 2012. *Mass communication theory: foundations, ferment and future*. 6th edition. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Barker-Caza, B & Creary, S. 2016. The construction of professional identity. In *Perspectives on contemporary professional work: challenges and experiences,* edited by A Wilkinson, D Hislop and C Coupland. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar:259–287.

Beattie, G & Ellis, A. 2017. The psychology of language and communication. New York, NY: Routledge.

Beaumie, K. 2012. *Review of social constructivism*. [O]. Available: http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Social_Constructivism Accessed on 2012/09/06.

Bell, JS. 2002. Narrative inquiry: more than just telling stories. *TESOL Quarterly,* 36(2):207–213. [O]. Available: http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3588331?uid=3739368&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21101150699557 Accessed on 2012/09/02.

Benozzo, A, Pizzorno, MC, Bell, H & Koro-Ljungberg, M. 2015. Coming out, but into what? Problematizing discursive variations of revealing the gay self in the workplace. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(3):292–306. [O]. Available: https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12081 Accessed on 2019/11/09.

Berelson, B. 1952. *Content analysis in communication research*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Berg, BL. 2001. *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Needham Heights, NY: Allyn and Bacon.

Bergen, KM & Braithwaite, DO. 2009. Identity is constituted in communication, in *21st Century communication: a reference handbook. Volume 1,* edited by WF Eadie. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE:165–176.

Berger, A. 1991. *Media research techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Berger, PL & Luckmann, T. 1966. *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Bergman, C, Dellve, L, & Skagert, K. 2016. Exploring communication processes in workplace meetings: a mixed methods study in a Swedish healthcare organization. *Work*, 54(3):533–541. [O]. Available: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5147501/ Accessed on 2019/03/12.

Bernstein, M & Swartwout, P. 2012. Gay officers in their midst: heterosexual police employees' anticipation of the consequences for coworkers who come out. *Journal of Homosexuality,* 59(8):1145–1166. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=qth&AN=79830421&si Accessed on 2016/06/03.

Bertram, C & Christiansen, I. 2014. *Understanding research: an introduction to reading research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Bezuidenhout, RM. (rosemarie.bezuidenhout@monash.edu). 2012. *Trustworthiness in terms of qualitative research inquiry as outlined by Lincoln and Guba*. [E-mail to M Koonin on 2012/08/31: mkoonin@iie.ac.za]. Accessed on 2012/09/4.

Bezuidenhout, RM & Cronje, F. 2014. Ethics in research, in *Research matters*, edited by F Du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis and RM Bezuidenhout. Cape Town: Juta:228–251.

Bitsani, E. 2013. Theoretical approaches to the organizational culture and the organizational climate: exploratory research examples and best policies in health care services. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 1(4):48–58. [O]. Available: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d187/0ae714f2508f33c411b474c4496ec7731a6c.pdf Accessed on 2019/10/05.

Blair, E. 2015. A reflexive exploration of two qualitative data coding techniques. *Journal of Methods and Measurements in the Social Sciences*, 6(1):14–29. [O]. Available: https://journals.uair.arizona.edu/index.php/jmmss/article/view/18772/18421 Accessed on 2019/07/12.

Bleakley, A. 2003. Review of social construction in context. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology,* 13(5):409–411.

Bless, H & Greifeneder, R. 2018. Introduction: what is social cognition research about? in *Social cognition: how individuals construct social reality.* 2nd edition, edited by H Bless, K Fiedler and F Strack. New York, NY: Routledge:1–16.

Blumer, H. 1969. *Symbolic interactionism: perspective and method*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Blumer, H. 1986. *Symbolic Interactionism: perspective and method*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Bornman, E. 2004. *Identity, social groups and communication*. [O]. Available: www.unisa.ac.za/contents/faculties/humanities/comm/docs/identity,%20social%20groups%20and%20communication.doc Accessed on 2014/05/19.

Bowen, GA. 2008. *Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: a research note*. [O]. Available: http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/8/1/137.short Accessed on 2012/09/08.

Bresnahan, M & Zhu, Y. 2017. Interpersonal communication and relationships across cultures, in *Intercultural communication,* edited by L Chen. Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter:199–218.

Brooks, ML. 2002. *Drawing to learn.* PhD thesis, University of Alberta, Canada. [O]. Available: http://www.une.edu.au/Drawing/pdf%20files/Social%20constructionism.pdf Accessed on 2012/09/06.

Bryman, A & Bell, E. 2014. *Research methodology: business and management context*. Cape Town: Oxford.

Budd, RW, Thorp, RK & Donohew, L. 1967. *Content analysis of communications*. London: Collier-Macmillan.

Burleson, B. 2011. A constructivist approach to listening. *International Journal of Listening*, 25(1/2):27–46.

Business Dictionary. 2015. [O]. Available: http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/cognitive-system.html Accessed on 2015/06/01.

Cacciattolo, K. 2015. Defining organisational communication. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(20):79–87. [O]. Available: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.909.8964&rep=rep1&type=pdf Accessed on 2019/07/25.

Cambridge Dictionary. 2019. [O]. Available: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stereotype Accessed on 2019/09/23.

Carter, MJ & Fuller, C. 2015. Symbolic interactionism. *Sociopedia.isa.* [O]. Available: http://www.sagepub.net/isa/resources/pdf/symbolic%20interactionism.pdf Accessed on 2019/04/22.

Cavalier, ES. 2011. Men at sport: gay men's experiences in the sport workplace. *Journal of Homosexuality,* 58(5):626–646. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=qth&AN=60294547&si Accessed on 2016/06/11.

Chapter 1. An orientation to organisational communication. [2007]. [O]. Available: http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/17539_Chapter_1.pdf Accessed on 2012/08/15.

Cheung, CMK, Lee, ZWY & Chan, TKH. 2015. Self-disclosure in social networking sites: the role of perceived cost, perceived benefits and social influence. *Internet Research*, 25(2):279–299.

Cho, SH. 2007. Effects of motivations and gender on adolescents' self-disclosure in online chatting. *CyberPsychology & Behavior,* 10(3):339–345.

Cobley, P & Schulz, PJ. 2013. Introduction, in *Theories and models of communication*, edited by P Cobley and PJ Schulz. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter:1–16.

Collis, J & Hussey, R. 2003. *Business research: a practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Collins, JC. 2016. Retaliatory strike or fired with cause: a case study of gay identity disclosure and law enforcement. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development,* 28(1):23-45. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=112534732&s Accessed on 2016/06/09.

Collins, JC & Rocco, TS. 2015. Rules of engagement as survival consciousness: gay male law enforcement officers' experiential learning in a masculinized industry. *Adult Education Quarterly,* 65(4):295–312. [O]. Available: http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/ehost/detail/detail?sid=22b45ba2-ce6c-441e-8bec-618bac7fc574%40sessionmgr4004&vid=20&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=110343152&db=aph Accessed on 2016/05/30.

Collins, R. 2011. Wiley's contribution to symbolic interactionist theory. *American Sociologist,* 42(2/3):156–167.

Collins Dictionary. 2019. [O]. Available: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/stereotype Accessed on 2019/09/23.

Cooke, RA & Lafferty, JC. 1987. *The organizational cultural inventory*. Plymouth, MI: Human Synergistics International.

Cooke, RA & Szumal, JL. 2004. Using the organizational culture industry to understand the operating cultures of organizations, in *Handbook of organisational culture and climate,* edited by NM Ashkanasy, PM Celeste and MF Peterson. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE:147–162.

Cooley, CH. 2009. *Human nature and the social order (1902)*. [Reprint]. New York, NY: Cornell University Library.

Coon, D & Mitterer, JO. 2014. *Psychology: a journey*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Corbin, J & Strauss, A. 1990. Grounded theory research: procedures, canons and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology,* 13(1). [O]. Available: https://med-fom-familymed-research.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2012/03/W10-Corbin-and-Strauss-grounded-theory.pdf accessed 2019/06/01 Accessed on 2019/07/01.

Cottingham, MD, Johnson, AH & Taylor, T. 2016. Heteronormative labour: conflicting accountability structures among men in nursing. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(6):535–550. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=118513638&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/05/13.

Craig, RT. 1999. Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory,* 9(2):161–199.

Cromby, J & Nightingale, D. 1999. *What is wrong with social constructionism*? [O]. Available: http://www-student.lut.ac.uk/~hujc4/What's%20wrong%20with%20constructionism.pdf Accessed on 2012/09/06.

Cronk, G. 2005. George Herbert Mead. *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. [O]. Available: www.iep.utm.edu/mead/ Accessed on 2015/01/04.

Croteau, R. 1996. Research on the work experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual people: an integrative review of methodology and findings. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 48(2):195–209.

Da Silva, FC. 2011. Introduction, in *G.H. Mead: a reader,* edited and introduced by FC da Silva. New York, NY: Routledge:ix-xxiv.

Davis, C. 2014. What is research? in *Research matters*, edited by F Du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis and RM Bezuidenhout. Cape Town: Juta:1–17.

Davis, K. 1953. *Management communication and the grapevine*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review.

Day, NE & Schoenrade, P. 1997. Staying in the closet versus coming out: relationships between communication about sexual orientation and work attitudes. *Personnel Psychology*, 50(1):147–163.

De Kay, SH. 2012. Interpersonal communication in the workplace: a largely unexplored region. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4):449–452.

De Ridder, JA. 2004. Organisational communication and supportive employees. *Human Resource Management Journal,* 14(3). [O]. Available: http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&hid=17&sid=7f7321d1-18f5-4771-b2f2-5ec32ec9e411%40sessionmgr10 Accessed on 2012/09/14.

Dean, BA. 2018. The interpretivist and the learner. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 13:1–8. [O]. Available: https://doi.org/10.28945/3936 Accessed on 2019/10/19.

Dentato, MP, Craig, SL, Messinger, L, Lloyd, M & McInroy, LB. 2014. Outness among LGBTQ social work students in North America: the contribution of environmental supports and perceptions of comfort. *Social Work Education*, 33(4):485–501.

Detenber, B, Wijaya, M & Goh, HY. 2008. *Blogging and online friendships: the role of self-disclosure and perceived reciprocity.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, TBA, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 21 May 2008.

Dictionary.com. Definitions. 2013. [O]. Available: https://www.dictionary.com/ Accessed on 2013/11/03.

Dietz-Uhler, B, Bishop-Clark, C & Howard, E. 2005. Formation of and adherence to a self-disclosure norm in an online chat. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 8(2):114–120.

Diggs-Brown, B. 2012. *Strategic public relations: an audience focused approach*. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Du Plooy, GM. 2009. *Communication research techniques, methods and applications*. Lansdowne: Juta.

Du Plooy-Cilliers, F. 2010. *An exploratory descriptive study of the construction of relationship quality in intimate relationships through the process of symbolic interaction with specific reference to rule and expectation violations*. D. Litt. et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Du Plooy-Cilliers, F & Louw, M. 2009. *Let's talk about interpersonal communication*. 3rd edition. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Du Plooy-Cilliers, F & Louw, M. 2014. *Let's talk about interpersonal communication*. 4th edition. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Duarte Melo, A, Balonas, S, Ruao, T & Felicio, M. 2016. Strategic communication for public health: a research action empowerment program, in *Strategic communication for non-profit organisations: challenges and alternative approaches,* edited by E Oliveira, A Duarte Melo and G Goncalves. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press:35–54.

Eddy, SN & Rumens, N. 2017. Diversity and inclusion for LGBT workers: current issues and new horizons for research. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 34(2):109–120.

Edmondson, AC. 2018. *Make your employees feel psychologically safe*. [O]. Available: https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/make-your-employees-psychologically-safe Accessed on 2019/04/19.

Elving, WJL. 2005. The role of communication in organisational change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal,* 10(2):129–138. [O]. Available: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjsqd-pi67lAhXNRBUIHY71BxgQFjAAegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.usq.edu.au%2F-%2Fmedia%2FUSQ%2FHR%2FOther%2Frole-of-communciation.ashx%3Fla%3Den&usg=AOvVaw2RedLD7JU2kaAu1FmxQiET Accessed on 2019/10/19.

Ehrhart, MG & Raver, JL. 2014. The effects of organizational climate and culture on productive and counterproductive behavior, in *The Oxford handbook of organizational climate and culture*, edited by B Schneider & KM Barbera. Oxford: Oxford University Press:153–176.

Enyia, CD & Orokor, LE. 2016. The role of formal and informal communication in determining employee affective and continuance commitment in oil and gas companies. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research: Social & Management Sciences*, 2(9):33–44.

Falkheimer, J & Heide, M. 2006. Multicultural crisis communication: towards a social constructionist perspective. *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management*, 14(4):180–189.

Flanagin, AJ. 2017. Online social influence and the convergence of mass and interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research*, 43(4):450–463.

Flick, U. 2018. *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: SAGE.

Fouché, CB & Schurink, W. 2011. Qualitative research designs, in *Research at grassroots for the social sciences and human service professions*, edited by AS De Vos, H Strydom, CB Fouché and CSL Delport. Pretoria: Van Schaik:307–327.

Fredriksson, M & Johansson, B. 2014. The dynamics of professional identity. *Journalism Studies,* 8(5). [O]. Available: http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/ehost/detail/detail?sid=178405c7-1334-442f-961b-c5bc739bf1f4%40sessionmgr103&vid=9&hid=102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=97806107&db=ufh Accessed on 2016/05/29.

Frey, LW, Botan, CH, Friedman, PG & Kreps, GL. 1991. *Investigating communication: an introduction to research methods*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Fuller, CP. 2015. *Organizational culture: leadership strategies, outcomes and effectiveness*. New York: Nova Science Publishers. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1020592&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/01/16.

Gabatz, RIB, Schwartz, E, Milbrath VM, Zillmer JGV & Neves, ET. 2017. Attachment theory, symbolic interactionism and grounded theory: articulating reference frameworks for research. *Texto & Contexto Enfermagen*, 26(4), 8 January 2017. [O]. Available: http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0104-07072017001940017 Accessed on 2019/04/22.

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). 2016. *GLAAD media reference guide*. 10th edition. [O]. Available: http://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD-Media-Reference-Guide-Tenth-Edition.pdf Accessed on 2019/03/31.

Gibson, W. 2016. Constructing knowledge through social research, in *Designing research in education: concepts and methodologies*, edited by J Swain. New York, NY: SAGE:54–73.

Gicuru, MJ. 2017. The interpretive research paradigm: a critical review of IS research methodologies. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies,* (4)2:1–5.

Giritli Nygren, K, Öhman, S & Olofsson, A. 2017. Doing and undoing risk: the mutual constitution of risk and heteronormativity in contemporary society. *Journal of Risk Research*, 20(3):418–432. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=120669601&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/05/24.

Groysberg, B, Lee, J, Price, J & Cheng, J. 2018. The leader's guide to corporate culture. *Harvard Business Review*, January–February 2018. [O]. Available: https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-culture-factor Accessed on 2019/06/01.

Guerrero, LK, Andersen, PA & Afifi, WA. 2018. *Close encounters: communication in relationships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Guest, G, Bunce, A & Johnson, L. 2006. *How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability.* [O]. Available: http://fmx.sagepub.com/content/18/1/59.short Accessed on 2012/09/08.

Gusmano, B. 2008. Coming out or not? How nonheterosexual people manage their sexual identity at work. *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 13(4):473–496.

Halas, E. 2012. Herbert Blumer on the interactional order: of the democratic society. *Polish Sociological Review,* 177:13–18.

Harry, I. 1983. Attribution, constructivism and images in interpersonal communication. *Communicator*, 13:62–79.

Hoover, SM & Russo, AM. 2002. *Modes of engagement in research on media meaning making*. Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Conference and General Assembly of the International Association for Media and Communication Research, Barcelona, Spain, 21–26 July.

Hughes, C. 2012. *Introduction to research methodologies*. [O]. Available: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/chughes/hughesc_index/teachingresearchprocess/whatisresearch/ Accessed on 2012/08/15.

Human Rights Campaign (HRC). 2014. *Sexual orientation and gender identity: terminology and definition*s. [O]. Available: www.hrc.org/resources/entry/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions Accessed on 2014/05/07.

Husain, Z. 2013. Effective communication brings successful organizational change. *The Business and Management Review,* 3(2):43–50.

Hynes, GE. 2012. Improving employees' interpersonal communication competencies: a qualitative study. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4):466–475.

Jabareen, Y. 2009. Building a conceptual framework: philosophy, definitions and procedure. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(4):49–62.

Jensen, M. 2018. The purpose of interpersonal communication: a survey to find the most likely general reasons why people engage in communication. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 11(1):25–38.

Jex, SM, Sliter, MT & Britton, A. 2014. Employee stress and well-being, in *The Oxford handbook of organizational climate and culture*, edited by B Schneider and KM Barbera. Oxford: Oxford University Press:177–196.

Keyton, J. 2014. Communication, organizational culture and organizational climate, in *The Oxford Handbook of organizational climate and culture*, edited by B Schneider and KM Barbera. Oxford: Oxford University Press:118–135.

Kelly, M, Dowling M & Miller M. 2018. The search for understanding: the role of paradigmatic worldviews. *Nurse Researcher*, 25(4):9–13. [O]. Available: https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/bitstream/handle/10379/14732/Kelly_Millar_and_Dowling_2018.pdf?sequence=1 Accessed on 2019/09/27.

King, J. 2016. The violence of heteronormative language towards the queer community. *Aisthesis,* 7(1):17–22. [O]. Available: https://pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/aisthesis/article/download/781/788 Accessed on 2019/05/13.

Kline, S, Hennen-Floyd, CL & Farrell, KM. 1990. Cognitive complexity and verbal response mode use in discussion. *Communication Quarterly*, 38(4):350–360.

Köllen, T. 2016. Lessening the difference is more: the relationship between diversity management and the perceived organizational climate for gay men and lesbians. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(17):1967–1996. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=116263447&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/05/13.

Koonin, M. 2014. Validity and reliability, in *Research matters*, edited by F Du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis and RM Bezuidenhout. Cape Town: Juta:252–261.

Kroeze, JH. 2012. Postmodernism, interpretivism and formal ontologies, in *Research methodologies, innovations and philosophies in software systems engineering and information systems*, edited by M Mora, O Gelman, A Steenkamp and MS Raisinghani. Hershey: IGI Global. [O]. Available: http://www.igi-global.com/viewtitlesample.aspx?id=63257&ptid=58293&t=postmodernism%2c+interpretivism%2c+and+formal+ontologies Accessed on 2012/11/14.

Krippendorf, K. 1980. *Content analysis an introduction to its methodology*. London: SAGE.

Kumar, R. 2014. *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. London: SAGE.

Larentis, F, Antonello, CS & Slongo, LA. 2017. Organizational culture and relationship marketing: an interorganizational perspective. *Review of Business Management*, 20(1):37–56.

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. [N.d.] *Basic vs applied research*. [O]. Available: http://www.sjsu.edu/people/fred.prochaska/courses/ScWk170/s0/Basic-vs.-Applied-Research.pdf Accessed on 2019/03/23.

Leahy, E. 2016. The socially constructed nature of meaning. *The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy*, 3(2016):27–37. [O]. Available: https://philosophy.vassar.edu/docs/2016-Philosophy-journal.pdf#page=31 Accessed on 2019/10/12.

Ledimo, O. 2015. Diversity management: an organisational culture audit to determine individual differences. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, 31(5):1747–1756.

Lee, KT, Joh, MJ & Koo, DM. 2013. Lonely people are no longer lonely on social networking sites: the mediating role of self-disclosure and social support. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking,* 16(6):413–418.

Legal Information Institute. 2019. *Definition of basic research*. [O]. Available: https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/32/272.3 Accessed on 2019/03/23.

Leithy, WE. 2017. Organizational culture and organizational performance. *International Journal of Economics and Management Sciences*, 6(4). [O]. Available: https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/organizational-culture-and-organizational-performance-2162-6359-1000442.pdf Accessed on 2019/06/01.

Lincoln, YS & Guba EG. 1985. Establishing trustworthiness, in *Naturalistic inquiry,* edited by YS Lincoln and EG Guba. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE:289–327.

Littlejohn, SW. 1999. *Theories of human communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Littlejohn, SW & Foss, KA. 2008. *Theories of human communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Littlejohn, SW & Foss, KA. 2011. *Theories of human communication*. 10th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lo, MC, Mohamad, AA, Ramayah, T, Abdullah, MA & Lim, MC. 2017. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 18(4):808–818.

Locke, F, Silverman, J & Spirduso, W. 2004. *Reading and understanding research*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Locke, F, Silverman, J & Spirduso, W. 2010. *Reading and understanding research*. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Louw, M. 2014. Ethics in research, in *Research matters*, edited by F Du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis and RM Bezuidenhout. Cape Town: Juta:262–273.

Lynch, M & McConatha, D. 2006. Hyper-symbolic interactionism: prelude to a refurbished theory of symbolic interaction or just old wine? *Sociological Viewpoint,* 22:87–96.

Maines, DR. 2001. *The faultline of consciousness: a view of interactionism in sociology*. Hawthorne, NY: Walter de Gruyter.

Markovic, MR & Salamzadeh, A. 2018. The importance of communication in business management, in *Business management*, *entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial tendencies*, edited by MR Markovic, S Vujicic and I Kyaruzi. London: Silver and Smith Publishers:11–28.

Marsh, D, Ercan, SA & Furlong, P. 2018. A skin not a sweater: ontology and epistemology in Political Science, in *Theory and methods in Political Science.* 4th edition, edited by V Lowndes, D Marsh and G Stoker. United Kingdom: Palgrave:177–198.

Mason, J. 2002. *Qualitative researching*. London: SAGE.

Matsueda, RL. 1992. Reflected appraisals, parental labeling and delinquency: specifying a symbolic interactionist theory. *American Journal of Sociology,* 97(6):1577–1611.

Mcintosh, P & Luecke, RA. 2008. *Interpersonal communication skills in the workplace*. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=387643&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/01/16.

Mead, GH. 1934. *Mind, self and society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Miller, K. 2005. *Communication theories: perspectives, processes and context*. 2nd edition. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Mizzi, RC. 2013. “There Aren't Any Gays Here”: encountering heteroprofessionalism in an international development workplace. *Journal of Homosexuality,* 60(11):1602–1624. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=qth&AN=91722656&si Accessed on 2016/06/11.

Mobley, SK. 2010. *Fragmented whole: a theory of narrative and identity*. [O]. Available: https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10355/8896/research.pdf?sequence=3 Accessed on 2012/08/29.

Moeng, SF. 2010. *A comprehensive university: constructing an organisational identity*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr Müller.

Morcos, M. 2018. *Organisational culture: definitions and trends*. [O]. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329140215_ORGANISATIONAL_CULTURE_DEFINITIONS_AND_TRENDS Accessed on 2019/05/26.

Moreira, L. 2018. Queer motherhood: challenging heteronormative rules beyond the assimilationist/radical binary. *Journal of International Women's Studies,* 19(2):14–27. [O]. Available: https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2001&context=jiws Accessed on 2019/05/13.

Morrione, TJ. 2004. Editors introduction, in *George Herbert Mead and human conduct,* edited and introduced by TJ Morrione. Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman and Littlefield:1–12.

Morris, CW. 1934. Introduction, in *Mind, self and society: from the standpoint of a social behaviorist,* edited and introduced by CW Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago Press:ix–xxxv.

Moss, JM, Gibson, DM & Dollarhide, CT. 2014. Professional identity development: a grounded theory of transformational tasks of counselors. *Journal of Counselling and Development,* 92. [O]. Available: http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=f9cc119d-d75e-4e7d-9ff5-528c7814fd77%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4114 Accessed on 2016/05/24.

Mouton, J. 2009. *Understanding social research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Myers, A. 2007. *A study of the differences between appropriate and inappropriate interpersonal self-disclosure in a work environment*. Master's dissertation, Department of Communication, Wichita State University.

Naumovski, V, Dana, LP, Pesakovic, G & Fidanoski, F. 2016. *The importance of interpersonal communication in public administration*. [O]. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313642138_The_importance_of_interpersonal_communication_in_public_administration/citation/download Accessed on 2019/01/21.

Neuman, LW. 2000. *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Needham Heights, NY: Allyn and Bacon.

Newman, S & Goode, N. 2019. Communication in the workplace: defining the conversations of supervisors. *Journal of Safety Research*, 70, September 2019:19–23.

Nygren, G & Stigbrand, K. 2014. The formation of a professional identity: journalism students in different media systems. *Journalism Studies*, 15(6). [O]. Available: http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=178405c7-1334-442f-961b-c5bc739bf1f4%40sessionmgr103&vid=5&hid=102 Accessed on 2016/05/29.

Nurchayo, R, Della, P, Irawan, DA & Ronaldy, J. 2018. How organisational culture, transformational leadership and job characteristics affect employee engagement at PT XYZ. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 26(T):1–12.

Nwogbaga, DME, Nwankwo, OU & Onwa, DO. 2015. Avoiding school management conflicts and crisis through formal communication. *Journal of Education and Practice,* 6(4). [O]. Available: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1083752.pdf Accessed on 2019/07/24.

Odor, H. 2018. Organisational culture and dynamics. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management,* 6(1):31–39.

O'Keefe, BJ & Delia, JG. 1979. Construct comprehensiveness and cognitive complexity as predictors of the number and strategic adaptation of arguments and appeals in a persuasive message. *Communication Monographs*, 46(4):231–240.

Okoro, E, Washington, MC & Thomas, O. 2017. The impact of interpersonal communication skills on organizational effectiveness and social self-efficacy: a synthesis. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 4(3):28–32.

Oludeyi, OS. 2015. A review of literature on work environment and work commitment: implication for future research in citadels of learning. *Journal of Human Resource Management,* 1(8):32–46. [O]. Available: https://www.jhrm.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/JournalOfHumanResourceMng2015vol18issue2-pages-32-46.pdf Accessed on 2019/04/19 Accessed on 2019/11/24.

Onday, O. 2016. Organization culture: from organisational culture of Schein to appreciative inquiry of Cooperrider and Whitney. *Elixir International Journal Organisational Behaviour*, 92:39002–39008. [O]. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309037093_Organization_Culture_Theory_From_Organizational_Culture_of_Schein_to_Appreciative_Inquiry_of_Cooperrider_Whitney Accessed on 2019/10/05.

Open University. 2012. *Engaging with educational research*. [O]. Available: http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=406964&section=5.3 Accessed on 2012/08/15.

Open University. 2019. *Understanding different research perspectives*. [O]. Available: https://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-management/understanding-different-research-perspectives/content-section-1 Accessed on 2019/03/21.

Overend, T & Lewins, F. 1973. A Berger and Luckmann critique*. La Trobe Sociology Papers*, No. 5.

Oxford Dictionary. 2019. [O]. Available: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/behaviour Accessed on 2019/04/15.

Pan, J & Lieber, P. 2008. Emotional disclosure and construction of the poetic "other" in a Chinese online dating site. *China Media Research,* 4(2):32–42.

Pascoe, G. 2014. Sampling, in *Research matters*, edited by F Du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis and RM Bezuidenhout. Cape Town: Juta:131–146.

Pate, J, Beaumont, P & Pryce, G. 2009. Organisations and the issue of multiple identities: who loves you baby? *VINE*, 39(4):319–338. [O]. Available: http://www.gwilympryce.co.uk/FDB2F687-1A91-4F09-BBDC-29C4CEAC0827/FinalDownload/DownloadId96D2DF68B6189CD5906A1A528FFAFEBB/FDB2F687-1A91-4F09-BBDC-29C4CEAC0827/publications/PBP_sep05.pdf Accessed on 2012/09/14.

Penman, R. 1992. Good theory and good practice: an argument in progress. *Communication Theory,* 2(2):234–250.

Pinegar, S & Daynes, JG. 2007. Locating narrative inquiry historically: thematics in the turn to narratives, in *Handbook of narrative inquiry: mapping a methodology,* edited by J Clandinin. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE:3–34. [O]. Available: http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/13548_Chapter1.pdf Accessed on 2012/08/16.

Pitout, M & Du Plooy, GM. 2001. Audience research, in *Media studies. Volume 11, Content, audiences and production*, edited by P Fourie. Lansdowne, Cape Town: Juta:301–320.

Plunkett, S. [s.a.] *Symbolic interactionism theory*. [O]. Available: https://www.communicationtheory.org/symbolic-interactionism-theory/ Accessed on 2013/08/05.

Prus, R. 2004. Symbolic interaction and classical Greek scholarship: conceptual foundations, historical continuities and transcontextual relevancies. *American Sociologist,* 35(1), Spring 2004:5–33.

Pudephatt, AJ & Prus, R. 2007. Causality, agency and reality: Plato and Aristotle meet George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. *Sociological Focus,* 40(3):265–286.

Puusa, A & Tolvanen, U. 2006. Organisational identity and trust. Electronic Journal *of Business Ethics and Organisational Studies,* 11(2). [O]. Available: http://ejbo.jyu.fi/pdf/ejbo_vol11_no2_pages_29-33.pdf Accessed on 2012/09/14.

Quain, S, Ambotumah, BB, Yidana, XD & Mensah-Livivnstone, IJNA. 2016. Practicalizing the theories of organizational culture: the exemplar of a sales team. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 8(9):98–109. [O]. Available: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cc98/2a0543e380a50b9c170b672619a261f09b4c.pdf Accessed on 2019/10/05.

Ragins, BR & Cornwell, JM. 2001. Pink triangles: antecedents and consequences of perceived workplace discrimination against gay and lesbian employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(6):1244–1261. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=12129181&si Accessed on 2016/05/30.

Rahman, MS. 2017. The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language “testing and assessment” research: a literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning,* 6(1):102–112.

Redmond, MV. 2015. Symbolic Interactionism. *English Technical Reports and White Papers* (Iowa State University), 4. [O]. Available: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/engl_reports/4 Accessed on 2019/04/22.

Robinson, BA. 2017. Heteronormativity and homonormativity in *Encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies*, edited by NA Naples. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell. [O]. Available: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss013/abstract;jsessionid=7C1D10B2602EB027B40B066151005C78.f04t02?userIsAuthenticated=false&deniedAccessCustomisedMessage Accessed on 2018/03/03.

Robinson, KL & Thelen, PD. 2018. What makes the grapevine so effective? An employee perspective on employee-organization communication and peer to peer communication. *Public Relations Journal*, 12(2). [O]. Available: https://prjournal.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Robinson_Thelen_What-Makes-the-Grapevine-So-Effective.pdf Accessed on 2019/07/24.

Rossman, GB & Rallis, SF. 2003. *Learning in the field: an introduction to qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Rostosky, SS & Riggle, DB. 2002. “Out” at work: the relation of actor and partner workplace policy and internalized homophobia to disclosure status. *Journal of Counselling Psychology,* 49(1):411–419. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pdh&AN=2002-18345- Accessed on 2016/06/09.

Ruben, BD & Gigliotti, RA. 2017. Communication: *sine qua* non of organizational leadership theory and practice. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 54(1):12–30. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=119968722&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/01/21.

Rumens, N. 2016. Towards queering the business school: a research agenda for advancing lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans perspectives and issues. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(1):36–51. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=111589752&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/05/13.

Saad, GB & Abbas, M. 2018. The impact of organizational culture on job performance: a study of Saudi Arabian public sector work culture. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 16(3):207–218.

Sabat, I, Trump, R & King, E. 2014. Individual, interpersonal and contextual factors relating to disclosure decisions of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 1(4):431–440.

Samuel, AB, Rahman, MM, Khairuddin, I, Uddin, MJ & Rahaman, MS. 2017. A synthesized literature review on organisational culture and corporate performance. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social and Behavioural Sciences,* 7(1):83–95.

Sankarasubramanyan, R & Joshi, W. 2013. Advaita and appreciative inquiry: perspectives on the social construction of reality. *AI Practitioner: International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry,* 15(1):17–21.

Schneider, B & Barbera, KM. 2014a. Introduction and overview, in *The Oxford handbook of organizational climate and culture*, edited by B Schneider and KM Barbera. Oxford: Oxford University Press:3–20.

Schneider, B & Barbera, KM. 2014b. Summary and conclusion, in The Oxford *handbook of organizational climate and culture*, edited by B Schneider and KM Barbera. Oxford: Oxford University Press:679–688.

Schein, EH. 1988. *Innovative cultures and organizations*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology [O]. Available: https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/2214/SWP-2066-21290193.pdf?sequence=1 Accessed on 2019/09/10.

Schurink, W, Fouché, CB & De Vos. AS 2011. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation, in *Research at grassroots for the social sciences and human service professions*, edited by AS De Vos, H Strydom, CB Fouché and CSL Delport. Pretoria: Van Schaik:397–423.

Schwandt, TA. 1998. Constructivist approaches to human inquiry, in *The landscape of qualitative research*, edited by NK Denzin and YS Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE:221–259.

Scott, D. 2016. Interpretivism as a theory of knowledge, in *The BERA/SAGE handbook of educational research*, edited by D Wyse, N, Selwyn, E Smith & LE Suter. London: SAGE:243–258.

Serpa, S. 2016. An overview of the concept of organisational culture. *International Business Management*, 10(1):51–61.

Shenton, AK. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information,* 22. [O]. Available: http://www.angelfire.com/theforce/shu_cohort_viii/images/Trustworthypaper.pdf Accessed on 2012/09/08.

Shoulders, CW & Myers, BE. 2011. Considering professional identity to enhance agriculture teacher development. *Journal of Agricultural Development,* 52(4). [O]. Available: http://files.eric.ed.gov.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/fulltext/EJ956105.pdf Accessed on 2016/05/24.

Singh, A. 2014. Role of interpersonal communication in organizational effectiveness. *International Journal of Research in Management and Business Studies*, 1(4):36–39.

Smith, MJ. 1988. *Contemporary communication research methods*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Steinberg, S. 2007. *An introduction to communication studies*. Cape Town: Juta.

Strydom, A & Bezuidenhout, RM. 2014. Qualitative data collection, in *Research matters*, edited by F Du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis and RM Bezuidenhout. Cape Town: Juta:1–17.

Strydom, H. 2011. Theory and literature in qualitative research, in *Research at grassroots for the social sciences and human service professions*, edited by AS De Vos, H Strydom, CB Fouché and CSL Delport Pretoria: Van Schaik:297–306.

Stryker, S. 2008. From Mead to a structural symbolic interactionism and beyond. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 34:15–31. [O]. Available: http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134649 Accessed on 2012/09/08.

Suryaningrum, DH. 2012. Assessing individual performance on information technology adoption: a new model. *Global Journal of Business Research,* 6(4):111–125.

Sutherland, L & Makauskaite, L. 2012. Examining the role of authenticity in supporting the development of professional identity: an example from teacher education. *The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning,* 64. [O]. Available: http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=12&sid=f9cc119d-d75e-4e7d-9ff5-528c7814fd77%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4114 Accessed on 2016/05/24.

Sutherland, C, Roberts, B, Gabriel, N, Struwig, J & Gordon, S. 2016. *Progressive prudes: a survey of attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa*. Johannesburg: The Other Foundation and the Human Sciences Research Council.

Tardy, CH & Dindia, K. 2018. Self-disclosure: strategic revelation of information in personal and professional relationships, in *Handbook of communication skills*, edited by O Hargie. London: Routledge:229–266.

Tatum, AK. 2018. Workplace climate and satisfaction in sexual minority populations: an application of social cognitive career theory. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 65(5):618–628.

Tejeda, MJ. 2006. Nondiscrimination policies and sexual identity disclosure: do they make a difference in employee outcomes? *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal,* 18(1):45–59. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2006-07656 Accessed on 2016/06/08.

Thanh, NC & Thanh, TTL. 2015. The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Education Science,* 1(2):24–27.

Tsai Y. 2011. Relationship between organizational culture, leadership behavior and job satisfaction. *BMC Health Services Research*, 11(98). [O]. Available: https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-11-98 Accessed 20 October 2019.

Tubbs, S & Moss, S. 2008. *Human communication*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Turaga, R. 2016. Organizational models of effective communication. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 10(2):56–65. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=117241436&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/01/21.

University College Dublin (UCS). [s.a.] *Constructivism and social constructivism.* [O] Available: http://www.ucdoer.ie/index.php/Education_Theory/Constructivism_and_Social_Constructivism Accessed on 2019/10/30 Accessed on 2019/11/24.

University of Texas Dallas. 2019. *Sexual identity*. [O]. Available: https://www.utdallas.edu/counseling/sexualidentity/ Accessed on 2019/04/15.

University of Twente. [2019]. *Communication studies theories: symbolic interactionism*. [O] https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Interpersonal-Communication-and-Relations/symbolic-interactionism/ Accessed on 2019/04/22.

Ültanır, E. 2012. An epistemological glance at the constructivist approach: constructivist learning in Dewey, Piaget and Montessori. *International Journal of Instruction*, 5(2):195–212.

Valentine, G. 1993. (Hetero)sexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11(4):395–413. https://doi.org/10.1068/d110395 Accessed on 2019/11/10.

Vitak, J. 2012. The impact of context collapse and privacy on social network site disclosures. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media,* 56(4):451–470.

Vryan, KD, Adler, PA & Adler, P. 2003. Identity, in *Handbook of symbolic interactionism*, edited by LT Reynolds and NJ Herman-Kinney. Oxford: AltaMira Press:367–390.

Wagner, DG. 2007. Symbolic interactionism and expectation states theory: similarities and differences. *Sociological Focus,* 40(2):121–137.

Waldeck, T. 2007. The effect of team composition on strategic sensemaking. Berlin: Springer.

Weick, KE. 2012. *Making sense of the organization: the impermanent organization*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Weinberg, D. 2002. *Qualitative research methods*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Weigert, AJ, Teitge, JS & Teitge, DW. 1986. *Society and identity: toward a sociological psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Welman, JC & Kruger, F. 2002. *Research methodology*. Cape Town: Oxford Southern Africa.

Welman, JC, Kruger, F & Mitchell, B. 2007. *Research methodology*. Cape Town: Oxford Southern Africa.

Wessel, JL. 2017. The importance of allies and allied organizations: sexual orientation disclosure and concealment at work. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(2):240–254.

Williams, M & Moser, T. 2019. The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review*, 15(1):45–55. [O]. Available: http://scholarspress.us/journals/IMR/pdf/IMR-1-2019/IMR-v15n1art4.pdf Accessed on 2019/07/24.

Wimmer, RD & Dominick, JR. 2004. *Mass media research: an introduction*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Wimmer, RD & Dominick, JR. 2011. *Mass media research: an introduction*. 9th edition. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Wood, JT. 2004. *Communication theories in action: an introduction*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Wood, JT. 2006. *Interpersonal communication: everyday encounters*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Zang, C, You, Y & Wang, S. 2015. Effect of organizational culture on knowledge management success: a multi-perspective approach, in *Organizational culture: leadership strategies, outcomes and effectiveness*, edited by CP Fuller. New York: Nova Science Publishers:45–58. [O]. Available: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1020592&site=ehost-live Accessed on 2019/01/16.

Zang, H & Huang, P. 2012. *China college students' use of SNSS: an exploration of gratifications, self-disclosure, offline social trust and online trust*. 62nd Annual Conference, Phoenix, AZ, 24–28 May 2012.

Zeyada, M. 2018. Organizational culture and its impact on organizational citizenship behavior. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(3):418–429.

ADDENDA

Addendum A: Summary of the dominant themes and sub-themes emerging from the data analysis

DOMINANT THEME: ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE DISCLOSURE OR NON-DISCLOSURE (Code O)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
O1	Physical location	At times, the location/region in which gay individuals work, impacts on how and/or if they will disclose their sexual identity.	O1.1 Physical location impacting disclosure	• When the physical location of where gay individuals live and/or work impacts on whether or not gay individuals disclose their sexual identity • When the physical location of where gay individuals live and/or work impacts on how willing or unwilling they are about disclosing their sexual identity

DOMINANT THEME: ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE DISCLOSURE OR NON-DISCLOSURE (Code O)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
O2	Organisational identity	References to how gay individuals perceive the treatment, inclusion and support they receive within their organisational contexts.	O.2.1 Organisational policies O.2.2 Policy and practice implementation by management O.2.3 Supportive management contingent O.2.4 Supportive and Psychologically safe work spaces	• The perception gay individuals have of the extent to which organisational policies protect them as gay individuals and their views on the importance or lack thereof of this • The way in which gay individuals feel the organisational policies are “lived out” by management in practice and how this does or does not influence their perceptions of disclosure of their sexual identity in the organisational context • Gay individuals’ perceptions about the influence that management support has on their disclosure experiences • The importance of social interactions in the organisational context towards psychologically safe organisations • Gay individuals’ perception about the influence that intolerance to discrimination within an organisation has on them disclosing their sexual identity in the organisational context

DOMINANT THEME: ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE DISCLOSURE OR NON-DISCLOSURE (Code O)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
O3	Disclosure motivators	Elements that gay individuals perceive as motivating them to disclose their sexual identity more freely to a colleague or colleagues, as well as the colleagues with whom gay individuals choose to share personal information in the organisational context and why.	O.3.1 Meaningful relationships at work O.3.2 Guilt/Dissonance O.3.3 Trust in colleagues O.3.4 Attitude and behaviour	• When a friendship or close bond exists between gay individuals and a colleague or colleagues and this increases the motivation for disclosure of their sexual identity • When gay individuals want to build more meaningful work relationships they may be motivated to disclose their sexual identity • When gay individuals are motivated to disclose their sexual identity based on guilt/dissonance for the act of not disclosing their sexual identity with a colleague or colleagues for varied reasons • When gay individuals trust or have an established relationship with a colleague or colleagues they could be motivated to disclose their sexual identity to said colleague or colleagues • When a colleague or colleagues attitude and/or behaviour is a deciding factor for gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity or not to them

DOMINANT THEME: ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE DISCLOSURE OR NON-DISCLOSURE (Code O)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
O4	Disclosure detractors	Elements that gay individuals perceive as preventing them from disclosing their sexual identity more freely to a colleague, as well as the colleagues with whom gay individuals choose not to share personal information in the organisational context and why.	O4.1 Attitude and behaviour O4.2 Conservative ideologies O4.3 Fear of rejection or social isolation	• Colleague or colleagues perceived by gay individuals as being deeply rooted in tribalism may discourage gay individuals from disclosing their sexual identity to them • Colleague or colleagues gay individuals perceive as having conservative views may discourage gay individuals from disclosing their sexual identity to them • Colleague or colleagues gay individuals perceive as unworldly or sheltered may discourage gay individuals from disclosing their sexual identity to them • Colleague or colleagues who speak in a derogatory way of gay individuals or display bigoted behaviour may discourage gay individuals from disclosing their sexual identity in their presence or to them • The fear of loss that disclosure may bring such as to a relationship or promotions may be a detractor to disclosure of sexual identity • When gay individuals perceive there is a risk that colleague or colleagues will respect them less post-disclosure , they may be detracted from disclosing their sexual identity to them

DOMINANT THEME: ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE DISCLOSURE OR NON-DISCLOSURE (Code O)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
				• When gay individuals do not disclose because of discrimination of a superior

DOMINANT THEME: SELF-PRSERVATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (Code A)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
A1	Avoidance strategies	Includes any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' avoidance of disclosing their sexual identity to a colleague. Examples include, but are not limited to, avoiding discussions about personal information with their colleagues, or avoiding or deflecting questions about their	A1.1 Physically leaving a location/conversation A1.2 Deflection A1.3 Lies of omission A1.4 Lies of commission A1.5 Ignore questions or comments made about their personal life A1.6 Selective disclosure	• When gay individuals physically leave the location/conversation when they feel they may have to disclose their sexual identity • When gay individuals deflect each time conversations of a personal nature arises • When gay individuals conceal being gay • When gay individuals are selective about to whom they disclose their sexual identity in the organisation for various

DOMINANT THEME: SELF-PRSERVATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (Code A)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		personal lives. This also includes gay individuals avoiding disclosure of their sexual identity or concealing being gay, being selective of whom they choose to, or only telling half-truths – even lying – about the fact that they are gay, even if only for a short period.		reasons, such as risk of loss of income, a client, someone the gay individual perceives as judgemental, *etc.* • When gay individuals feel ill-equipped socially, emotionally or psychologically to disclose their sexual identity
A2	Personal pronoun game	Any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' use of personal pronouns when referring to a partner or prospective partner prior to disclosure of their sexual identity, in order to avoid a colleague knowing what the gender of their partner is. For example, using "they" or "we", instead of gender specific	A2.1 Avoid personal pronouns A2.2 Use gender neutral terms A2.3 Use of word partner	• Avoiding the use of the personal pronouns s/he to avoid disclosure • Using gender-neutral terms such as "us" and "we" when referring to a partner • Using gender-neutral words such as 'partner' when speaking to a colleague or colleagues who does not yet know the sexual identity of the gay individual

DOMINANT THEME: SELF-PRSERVATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (Code A)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		personal pronouns such as "her" or "him". This theme also includes the use of purposeful strategic communication, such as the use of gender neutral words such as "partner" or "my other half", as opposed to gender specific terms like "husband", "wife" or "boyfriend " and "girlfriend".		
A3	Non-conformity strategies	Any elements that demonstrate gay individuals' non-conformity to disclosure of their sexual identity because of working in a heteronormative environment.	A3.1 Going against Heteronormativity A3.2 Defiance of heteronormative environments	• When gay individuals for varied reasons decide not to disclose their sexual identity. Such as for example because heterosexual individuals are not required to disclose their sexual identity • When gay individuals disclose their sexual identity to a colleague or colleagues by eliciting some form of shock • When gay individuals use an uncontrolled form of disclosure of their sexual identity to a colleague or colleagues such as "blurting it out"

DOMINANT THEME: SELF-PRSERVATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (Code A)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
				• When gay individuals only disclose their sexual identity if a colleague or colleagues asks directly

DOMINANT THEME: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) (Code B)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
Communication disclosure strategies				
B1	Defiance	Any elements that demonstrate that the way in which the gay individual has disclosed his/her sexual identity in a brazen or bold way, including the use of shock tactics. It is important to note that defiance is only a communication strategy when it is a planned and considered disclosure. If it were spontaneous, then it	B1.1 Eliciting some form of shock B1.2 Uncontrolled form of disclosure such as "blurting it out" B1.3 When gay individuals only disclose their sexual identity if a colleague or colleagues ask directly	• When gay individuals for varied reasons decide not to disclose their sexual identity. Such as for example because heterosexual individuals are not required to disclose their sexual identity • When gay individuals disclose their sexual identity to a colleague by eliciting some form of shock • When gay individuals use an uncontrolled form of disclosure of their sexual identity to a colleague such as "blurting it out" • When gay individuals only disclose their sexual identity if a colleague asks directly

DOMINANT THEME: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) (Code B)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		would form part of the sub-theme of 'it just happened'.		
B2	Strategic leading and communication	When gay individuals make a choice to communicate in a way that results in them disclosing their sexual identity by chance, but still by their own choice. This includes elements of gay individuals in some way hinting about being gay or leading a colleague to find out that s/he is gay. It would include gay individuals strategically communicating in such a way that leads a	B2.1 Accidental disclosure B2.2 Utilising strategic communication tools B2.3 Revealed in the company of colleagues who know B2.4 Strategic reference to partner by name B2.5 Storytelling B2.6 Bring a partner to a function as a "plus one"	• When gay individuals lead a colleague to prompt the gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity. • When gay individuals speak about their partner in a way that implies that a colleague should know to whom they are referring. Therefore, shifting the focus away from gay individuals having to disclose themselves: it either prompts questions by those participating in the conversation or those participating feel so uncomfortable that they do not force disclosure • When gay individuals lead a colleague to prompt the gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity

DOMINANT THEME: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) (Code B)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		colleague to ask a gay individual questions resulting in the gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity.		
Spontaneous communication disclosure				
B3	Defensive reaction to ridicule	Elements when gay individuals feel prompted to disclose their sexual identity, after a colleague has made a derogatory comment or displayed derogatory behaviour about gay individuals in their presence. The defensive reaction often leads gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity.	B3.1 Defending gay individuals B3.2 Derogatory language B3.3Prejudice/discriminatory behaviour	• When others use derogatory language about gay individuals in their organisational context thus prompting the gay individual to disclose that they are gay to defend gay people • When colleague or colleagues in some way demonstrate “homophobic” behaviour and this prompts gay individuals to disclose their sexual identity

DOMINANT THEME: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) (Code B)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
B4	It "Just Happened"	Includes elements that demonstrate that the disclosure of sexual identity within the organisational context can occur with no specific communication strategies, but rather spontaneously. In this context, a gay individual's sexual identity is disclosed during everyday conversations between him/herself and his/her colleagues, who may piece it together themselves, based on interactions with the gay individual. This theme is also categorised by gay individuals having no recollection of how their	B4.1 No recollection of how disclosure occurred B4.2 Disclosure occurred through everyday conversations B4.3 Colleagues "just figured it out" B4.4 It just came up in conversation between the gay individual and a colleague	• When sexual identity in the organisational context is disclosed in everyday conversations between gay individuals and their colleague or colleagues • When there is no substantive event leading to the disclosure of a gay individuals sexual identity • When a colleague or colleagues based on interactions with the gay individual pieces it together that the individual is gay

DOMINANT THEME: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) (Code B)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		sexual identity were disclosed or just “blurting out” this information.		
Externally controlled disclosure				
B5	Direct questioning	Elements of gay individuals being pushed to disclose their sexual identity by others directly asking them questions about their sexual identity, partner or personal life by a colleague. The gay individual may decide not to answer, but if s/he does answer, then the disclosure has been prompted by external people asking questions.	B5.1 Only disclose if directly asked	• When gay individuals will only disclose their sexual identity if they are directly asked questions about their sexual identity by a colleague or colleagues

DOMINANT THEME: REALITY-ALTERING EVENT (DISCLOSURE) (Code B)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
B6	"Outed" by others	Elements that demonstrate that gay individuals' sexual identity has been revealed by others or has been revealed accidentally. For example, gay individuals could be intentionally or unintentionally "outed", if a colleague finds out that they are gay via a rumour, gossip or grapevine communication, and the gay individual becomes aware of it. Another example is a colleague being unaware that others are not aware of the individual being gay and "outs" the gay individual to colleagues who do not know the individual is gay.	B6.1 Purposeful actions that lead to disclosure B6.2 Accidental actions that lead to disclosure B6.3 Disclosure via grapevine communication B6.4 Disclosure via rumours and/or gossip	• When a colleague or colleagues intentionally discloses to other colleague or colleagues that an individual is gay. This could be accidental or for example via gossip or rumour • When a colleague or colleagues unintentionally discloses to other colleague or colleagues that an individual is gay. This could be accidental or for example via gossip or rumour • When the "rumour mill" or grapevine communication is the way gay individuals' sexual identity is disclosed

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
Positive re-communication				
C1	Spontaneous communication	Elements of gay individuals perceiving that their disclosure led to improved and/or more open communication with colleagues. Thus, altering from strategic communication having to measure and consider everything being said to more spontaneous and open communication, where the gay individuals share more in-depth and personal information and have more meaningful relationships with the colleagues to whom they have disclosed.	C1.1 Open Communication C1.2 A feeling that an individual can be his/her true self C1.3 Increases inclusivity C1.4 More meaningful relationships C1.5 Comfort C1.6 Increased trust in colleagues	• When disclosure results in more spontaneous communication between a gay individual and his/her colleagues • When disclosure results in more open communication between a gay individual and his/her colleagues • When disclosure results in more meaningful communication between a gay individual and his/her colleagues • When disclosure results in gay individuals perception of a colleague as a non-judgemental individual, thereby creating a positive feeling for the gay individual of a "safe space" to come to in the organisational context • When disclosure results in more enquiry from a colleague or colleagues about the gay individual's sexual identity

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
C2	Positive emotions	Elements where gay individuals' experience any positive emotions linked to the disclosure of their sexual identity as gay.	C2.1 Improved mental wellbeing C2.2 Authenticity C2.3 Relief C2.4 Perceived increase productivity C2.5 Gay individuals are positively influenced to tell others	• When gay individuals' disclosure results in them perceiving the disclosure as resulting in a healthier state of existence in the organisational context post-disclosure • When gay individuals' feel that they are more authentic to their true self post-disclosure • When gay individuals positively perceive their colleagues or feeling more positive towards them post-disclosure • When disclosure affords gay individuals a sense of relief now that colleague or colleagues know their sexual identity
C3	Increased understanding of gay individuals	Elements when gay individuals' disclosure has led to a colleagues improved understanding or acceptance of gay individuals because of their interaction with these colleagues that are gay.	C3.1 Common understanding about gay individuals C3.2 Altered perception of gay individuals through the relationships developed C3.3 Camaraderie	• When colleague or colleagues attempt to find common ground or show their understanding or support of gay individuals by referring to other gay individuals' they have encountered in their lives • When male colleague or colleagues see gay woman as "one of the boys"

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
C4	Neutrality	Elements where gay individuals perceived no change or a neutral response to interaction behaviour after disclosure of their sexual identity to colleagues. This is categorised as positive, because these colleagues have remained consistent when gay individuals perceived that they may have been judged, but they demonstrated that is not the case.	C4.1 Disclosure leads to no perceived change in relationship or interaction behaviour	• When the interaction behaviour of colleagues does not in any way alter with the disclosure
C5	Positively influence telling others	When gay individuals refer to positive experiences of disclosure positively influencing their willingness to disclose to others.	C5.1 Ease of disclosure	• Gay individuals feel more open to communicate about their sexual identity • When disclosure of gay individuals sexual identity leads them to disclose to more colleagues or more

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
				easily to colleagues when they move organisations, based on their past experiences
			Negative re-communication	
C6	Discrimination by superior	Elements where gay individuals' have had negative disclosure encounters with a senior staff member in the organisational context, which has negatively altered their interaction behaviour with their superior.	C6.1 Poor management style C6.2 Harassment and/or inappropriate behaviour by superior C 6.3 Bigotry by superior	When gay individuals feel intimidated by a manager post-disclosure of their sexual identity When the gay individuals feel dismissed by a manager post-disclosure of their sexual identity Inappropriate comments made by managers to gay individuals post-disclosure of their sexual identity
C7	Personal questions	Elements where communication post-disclosure is linked to any questions that are of a personal nature or have a sexual or derogatory overture. It also includes discussions on what the gay individual deems as	C7.1 Personal questions of a sexual nature C7.2 Questions about personal information C7.3 Comparison to heterosexuality	When a colleague asks a gay individual personal questions linked to sexual overtures post-disclosure of their sexual identity When colleagues ask gay individuals personal questions linked to religion post-disclosure of their sexual identity When colleagues ask gay individuals personal questions linked to things that are equated with a

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		inappropriate to engage in with colleagues.		heterosexual relationship such as marital status, marriage, children, *etc.*
C8	Social isolation	Elements where gay individuals may perceive that they have been excluded from post-disclosure such as social exclusion. This exclusion may occur for a limited or more extended period.	C8.1 Excluded from social interactions or events C8.2 Social isolation	When gay individuals perceive they are left out of things, or that invitations to social interactions with a colleague stop after disclosure of their sexual identity When gay individuals perceive a shift in their work climate post-disclosure of their sexual identity When gay individuals feel social isolation post-disclosure of their sexual identity
C9	Less meaningful communication	Includes elements that demonstrate how gay individuals' disclosure of their sexual identity has led to less meaningful communication with a colleague.	C9.1 Inability to share C9.2 Less truthful interactions C9.3 Barriers to meaningful communication C9.4 Prejudiced or judgmental actions	When gay individuals have an inability to share their sexual identity and this limits truthful interaction behaviour When gay individuals colleague or colleagues are perceived by the gay individual as closed-minded When gay individuals perceive something to be a barrier to having meaningful communication if a colleague or colleagues new they were gay for example religion

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
				• When gay individuals' perceive a colleague or colleagues as judgemental towards their lifestyle post-disclosure and this influences interaction behaviour • When disclosure results in uncomfortable interactions between a gay individual and a colleague after disclosure
C10	Stereotyping	When communication after gay individuals have disclosed their sexual identity includes stereotyping of gay individuals, based on socially constructed views of what it means to be gay.	C10.1 Stereotyping around physical appearance C10.2 Stereotyping around the butch/feminine dichotomy C10.3 Stereotyping around dress sense	• Stereotyping around physical appearance • Stereotyping around the butch/feminine dichotomy • Stereotyping around dress sense
C11	Offensive or inappropriate humour	This theme has three parts: (i) gay individuals disclosing their sexual identity using offensive or inappropriate humour; (ii) a colleague making jokes about gay individuals, resulting in the	C11.1 Colleagues joking about gay individuals C11.2 Joke about the disclosure C11.3 Humour as a protection mechanism	• When a colleague or colleagues of the gay individuals make jokes or say things in jest about gay individuals in general • When the gay individuals or colleagues use jokes or analogies to make light of the disclosure or treat it as insignificant

DOMINANT THEME: RE-COMMUNICATION (Code C)				
Code	**Themes: selective coding**	**Definition of theme for co-coding and shared meaning: selective coding**	**Sub-theme: axial coding grouped out of open coding**	**Descriptors of sub-themes**
		gay individual disclosing his/her sexual identity; (iii) the post-disclosure communication between gay individuals and a colleague includes continual jokes or mockery related to gay individuals.		• When gay individuals use humour as a protection mechanism post-disclosure of their sexual identity

Addendum B: Informed consent: Participation in semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry

Ethics clearance reference number: [2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_008]

Date

Title: A re-communication framework: an exploration of perceived shifts in interaction behaviour after a Reality-altering event within an organisational context.

Dear (Participants names were inserted)

I am working towards a Doctor of Literature and Philosophy in Communication at the University of South Africa, under the supervision of Prof Rachél Barker and Dr Franzél Du Plooy-Cilliers, who are both academics who specialise in the field of Communication.

You are invited to volunteer to participate in a research study titled: ***A re-communication framework: an exploration of perceived shifts in interaction behaviour after a reality-altering event within an organisational context.*** The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of a communication phenomenon that was previously unidentified, unexplained and unlabelled - termed re-communication. To provide a re-communication framework to describe the communication strategies gay individuals use before they disclose to colleagues within their organisation that they are gay, the strategies they use to disclose it and the perceived shifts in interaction behaviour (communication) for the gay individuals with their colleagues after they have disclosed.

The information in this consent form is provided in order to assist you in deciding whether you would like to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, an in-depth interview will be conducted with you. You will also be asked to share with the researcher a scenario of one positive and one negative experience you had within your workplace when you told a work colleague or colleagues that you are gay. The interview will take place at a place and time of your choice and convenience. The interview will take approximately one and a half hours. You will be asked questions about what your relationship and communication was like with colleagues before you told them you were

gay, how you told colleagues that you are gay and why you chose to share the fact that you are gay with them in this way. Finally, you will be asked to provide examples of how or if you believe that your own communication behaviour to these colleague or colleagues changed after you have disclosed to a colleague or colleagues that you are gay.

It is important that you fully understand what is involved if you agree to participate in this study. If you have, any additional questions that you feel are not fully addressed or fully explained in this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. The contact details of the researcher are as follows:

Email address: marlakoonin@gmail.com
Mobile number: +27 82 474 2882
Office number: +27 11 676 8021

WHAT IS THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I am conducting this research to develop a communication framework. This entails identifying and describing a communication phenomenon that has not been identified, explained or labelled before - called re-communication. In this study, it is assumed that gay individuals may make use of communication strategies (ways of communicating) pre disclosure to conceal, disguise or avoid discussions about their sexual identity in the workplace until they are ready to disclose that they are gay. Secondly, it is assumed that each time gay individuals decide to tell some of their colleagues they are gay they will use certain strategies (ways of communicating to people that they are gay) that they perceive to be the most suitable disclosure strategy given the colleague or colleagues they are telling. Lastly, it is assumed that there may or may not be a change or shift in the communication of the gay individual with his/her colleagues after s/he has told them s/he is gay. The purpose is to gain a deeper insight into these assumptions.

Your participation in this study will provide me with valuable information and insight into your communication behaviour in your workplace when you disclose to work colleagues that you are gay. It will provide me with the necessary information to identify and describe the different strategies and processes involved in sharing with colleagues that you are gay and from these insights, a re-communication framework will be developed.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been selected because:

- You are an openly gay individual;
- You are a professional;
- You have worked for your current organisation for at least one year;

I am using a purposive sample, which means I have only selected participants that I know personally or who were referred to me.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role in this study is to answer questions and have a discussion related to your communication behaviour with your colleague or colleagues in your organisation before you told them that you are gay. The ways, in which you told your colleague that, you are gay. Finally, your view on if and how your communication behaviour with those colleague or colleagues changed after you told them that you are gay.

The study involves semi-structured interviews (questions asked by the researcher and answered by you) and narratives (this is a form of storytelling – you will be given guidelines and you will then describe a positive and a negative experience of when you told a colleague that you are gay).

You are free to elaborate on any aspect you feel like and you are welcome to express your feelings and opinions in any way you want. Please include as much detail in the discussion as you feel comfortable. If you do not want to answer a question, you have every right to refuse to answer without having to provide an explanation.

Only me as the researcher will have access to the information you share and your identity will not be revealed to anyone. Although the interview will be recorded, this will only be for record keeping and transcribing purposes. I will use a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality clause) with no affiliation to you, to transcribe the recordings but he/she will have no access to your name or any other identifying details and will only transcribe what was discussed for record keeping. No other person besides the researcher will therefore have access to your identity. No names will be mentioned in any of the documents and no information that can be directly linked to you or any other person who

participated in this research will be used. All the individuals' identities who participate in this study will be protected at all times.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will keep this information sheet and be asked to sign a written consent form (attached). You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, even if you have signed the consent form and agreed to participate

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study will allow you to share your experiences of being a gay individual working in a predominantly heteronormative environment, and the sharing of your experiences will contribute to a deeper and better understanding of an unchartered communication phenomenon. The framework that will be developed will explain the re-communication phenomenon. This will provide others with insight into the way gay individuals' communicate with colleagues before they tell them they are gay, how they tell colleagues that they are gay and the perception of gay individuals of the shift in communication behaviour between themselves and their colleagues (if any) once they disclose that they are gay. Your contribution will also be instrumental in identifying and describing the re-communication phenomenon.

People spend a large part of their lives at work and with their work colleagues and even if they are not at work, they spend most of their lives as part of organisations; that is religious institutions, schools, universities *et cetera*. Therefore, peoples' lives are dominated by an organisational context and it is important that people are able to socially adapt within these contexts as gay individuals. Your contribution will offer insight into the communication between colleagues after a reality-altering event (in this case that is the disclosure of being gay).

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

No risks for participating in this study are envisaged. However, you might experience emotional discomfort while discussing some negative experiences of disclosing to others

that you are gay. It is not anticipated that this will cause serious harm. However, the name and contact details of an experienced clinical psychologist in your area can be given to you by the researcher for your own account should you feel that you were negatively affected.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

ALL information obtained in this study will be held in strict confidence and only a transcriber and I will have access to the original data. The transcriber will have no knowledge of your identity. Results will be presented in such a way that you will be unidentifiable. No information that can be easily associated with you will be used in this study. Your identity will be sacrosanct. If a direct quote from you is used, the text will be sent to you and only after you are satisfied and have given consent, will the quote be used in the final document.

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers (with no reference to your identity) may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that the analysis of the results are done properly, including the transcriber, the supervisors, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records will be available only to the researcher, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Please note that your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Whilst a report of the study may be submitted for publication, individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers (with no identifying features) for a period of five years in a locked cupboard for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected file on a password-

protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. At the end of the five years hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be stored and if required deleted from the hard drive.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any payment to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary. The researcher will meet you at a location that best suites you so that you do not have to incur any transport costs.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee **[2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_008]** of the University of South Africa (UNISA). A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Marla Koonin on 082 474 2882 or marlakoonin@gmail.com. The findings are accessible prior to completion if required. Once the dissertation is submitted, the findings cannot be adjusted or withdrawn but up until submission, they will be available for change or withdrawal. Once submitted they will be available for viewing.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supevisors Prof Rachél Barker (barker@unisa.ac.za) and Dr Franzél Du Plooy-Cilliers (franzel.cilliers@gmail.com). Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the UNISA Research Ethics Review Committee.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that Marla Koonin as the researcher is asking my consent to take part in this research and has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the in-depth semi-structured interviews and narratives and understand that besides the researcher a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality clause) will have access to these recordings whilst transcribing the information.

I understand that I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname……(please print)

Participant
Signature……..Date……

Researcher's Name & Surname……(please print)

Researcher's signature……..Date……..

Addendum C: Standard semi-structured interview questions

Due to the fact that this is a semi-structured interview the questions are fluid and may be adjusted and or left out and or new questions included to ensure the interview is individualised. These are examples of the type of questions.

You will be able to ask for clarity at any point and or to not answer questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. You will be given the opportunity to add additional questions and information at the end of the process.

General Questions

Please provide the following information:

Information	Answer
Age	
Gender	
Race	
Occupation	
How long have you been openly gay?	
Years of service at your current organisation	
Would you say you have told the majority or minority of people in your organisation that you are gay?	
Would you say the majority of people that you have told you are gay at work have reacted positively or negatively?	

Theme A: Questions related to your communication strategies (ways of communicating) to your colleagues before you disclosed to them that you are gay

A1. Who do you share personal information with at work and why those colleagues?

Answer:

A2. What motivates you to tell a colleague or colleagues that you are gay?
Answer:

A3. What would prevent you from telling a colleague or colleagues that you are gay?
Answer:

A4. Is there any specific way that you communicate to your colleagues when discussions about your personal life or gay people come up with a colleague or colleagues that you have not yet told you are gay? If yes, can you describe this way/s of communicating?
Answer:

A5. What about a colleagues personal circumstances, views or beliefs would influence the way in which you tell them you are gay?
Answer:

A6. Please share with me one or two examples of experiences where the way you communicated with colleagues before they knew you were gay differed to the way you communicated with these colleagues after you told them you were gay.
Answer:

Theme B: Questions related to the way you told colleagues you are gay within your organisation

B1. Is the way that you tell colleagues that you are gay, the same for all colleagues or does the way differ depending on the colleague or colleagues? If the way differs, please explain why you use/choose different strategies (ways of telling) different colleagues.
Answer:

B2. Please provide examples of the strategies (ways of telling) that you use to tell colleagues you are gay.
Answer:

B3. What makes you decide on the way (strategy) you are going to tell colleagues you are gay? For example, does the fear of rejection, a lack of trust, the fact that the person is an open and liberal person in your view, or anything else influence the way in which you tell the person that you are gay.

Answer:

B4. What do you consider the main risks or benefits of telling a colleague or colleagues that you are gay and why?

Answer:

B5. What makes you feel more or less open or more or less likely to share with them that you are gay?

Answer:

B6. Do you find it more or less of a risk to your relationships to tell people in your personal life or you professional life that you are gay and why?

Answer:

Theme C: Questions related to any perceived shifts in communication between you and a colleague or colleagues that you feel you have experienced after telling them that you are gay

C1. After you have told a colleague or colleagues that you are gay, has the communication between you and your colleague or colleagues changed? What are you or they doing differently in your view?

Answer:

C2. Do you think being gay could or has in any way influenced your reputation within your organisation? If so, in what way?

Answer:

C3. Sometimes you can communicate naturally without thinking about what you should or should not say and other times you would feel you have to think more carefully about what you are saying depending on with whom you are communicating. What are the things that make you feel you do or do not need to monitor your communication with a colleague?

Answer:

Theme D: Questions related to disclosure and your organisation

D1. Please give your overall perception and experience of telling people you are gay within your current organisation?

Answer:

D2. Did the way you were treated by the majority of colleagues when you told them you were gay influence your work and or feeling of working for the organisation? If yes, then what type of things does it influence for example loyalty, productivity, work ethic, social aspects, *etc.*?

Answer:

D3. Do you believe your views, values and beliefs align with that of your organisation? Please provide detail of how they do or do not align.

Answer:

D4. Have you ever shared your disclosure experiences with other gay individuals? Have they had similar experiences?

Answer:

D5. What do you think builds a relationship with colleagues?

Answer:

Addendum D: Informed consent: Participation in narrative inquiry

Ethics clearance reference number: [2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_008]

Date:

Title: A re-communication framework: an exploration of perceived shifts in interaction behaviour after a reality-altering event within an organisational context.

Dear (Participants names were inserted)

My name is **Marla Koonin** and I am working towards a Doctor of Literature and Philosophy in Communication at the University of South Africa, under the supervision of Prof Rachél Barker and Dr Franzél Du Plooy-Cilliers, who are both academics who specialise in the field of Communication.

You are invited to volunteer to participate in a research study titled: ***A re-communication framework: an exploration of perceived shifts in interaction behaviour after a reality-altering event within an organisational context.*** The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of a communication phenomenon that has not been identified, explained or labelled before termed re-communication and to provide a re-communication framework to describe the communication strategies gay individuals use before they disclose to colleagues within their organisation that they are gay, the strategies they use to disclose it and the perceived shifts in interaction behaviour (communication) for the gay individuals with their colleagues after they have disclosed it.

The information in this consent form is provided in order to assist you in deciding whether you would like to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to share with the researcher a scenario of one positive and one negative experience you have had within your workplace when you told (disclosed) a work colleague or colleagues that you are gay. The narrative inquiry will take place via a medium of your choice and convenience - either telephonically, via email or face-to- face. Answering the narratives should not take more than 30 minutes. You will be asked to describe these instances of disclosure, how you told these colleagues that you are gay and how or if the

communication with these colleagues changed after you told them. Finally, you will explain if this disclosure has influenced your decision to tell other colleagues you are gay.

It is important that you fully understand what is involved if you agree to participate in this study. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not fully addressed or fully explained in this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. The contact details of the researcher are as follows:

Email address: marlakoonin@gmail.com
Mobile number: +27 82 474 2882
Office number: +27 11 676 8021

WHAT IS THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I am conducting this research to develop a communication framework. This entails identifying and describing a communication phenomenon that has not been identified, explained and labelled before - called re-communication. In this study it is assumed that gay individuals may make use of communication strategies (ways of communicating) pre disclosure to conceal, disguise or avoid discussions about their sexual identity in the workplace until they are ready to disclose that they are gay. Secondly, it is assumed that each time gay individuals decide to tell some of their colleagues they are gay they will use certain strategies (ways of communicating to people that they are gay) that they perceive to be the most suitable disclosure strategy given the colleague or colleagues they are telling. Lastly, it is assumed that there may or may not be a change or shift in the communication of the gay individual with his/her colleagues after s/he has told them s/he is gay. The purpose is hence to gain a deeper insight into these assumptions.

Your participation in this study will provide me with valuable information and insight into your communication behaviour in your workplace when you disclose to work colleagues that you are gay. It will provide me with the necessary information to identify and describe the different strategies and processes involved in sharing with colleagues that you are gay and from these insights a re-communication framework will be developed.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been selected because:

- You are an openly gay individual;
- You are a professional;
- You have worked for your current organisation for at least one year;

I am using a purposive sample, which means I have only selected participants I know personally or who were referred to me. I received your details from [this will be customised per participant]

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role in this study is to describe one positive and one negative instance you have had in telling colleagues that you are gay. You will describe these instances by means of narratives (this is a form of storytelling – you will be given guidelines and you will then describe a positive and a negative experience of when you told a colleague that you are gay).

You are free to elaborate on any aspect you feel like and you are welcome to express your feelings and opinions in any way you want. Please include as much detail in the discussion as you feel comfortable with. If you do not want to answer a question, you have every right to refuse to answer without having to provide an explanation.

Only the researcher will have access to the information you share and your identity will not be revealed to anyone. Although the narrative will be recorded (either by audio if conducted telephonically or face-face and electronically if via e-mail), this will only be for record keeping and transcribing purposes. I will use a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality clause) with no affiliation to you, to transcribe the information but he/she will have no access to your name or any other identifying details and will only transcribe what was discussed for the purpose of record keeping. No other person besides the researcher will therefore have access to your identity. No names will be mentioned in any of the documents and no information that can be directly linked to you or any other person who participated in this research will be used. All the individuals' identities who participate in this study will be protected at all times.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, even if you have signed the consent form and agreed to participate

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study will allow you to share your experiences of being a gay individual working in a predominantly heteronormative environment, and sharing your experiences will contribute to a deeper and better understanding of an unchartered communication phenomenon. The framework that will be developed will explain the re-communication phenomenon, which will provide others with insight into the way gay individuals' communicate with colleagues before they tell them they are gay, how they tell colleagues that they are gay and the perception of gay individuals of the shift in communication behaviour between themselves and their colleagues (if any) once they disclose that they are gay. Your contribution will also be instrumental in identifying and describing the re-communication phenomenon.

People spend a large part of their lives at work and with their work colleagues and even if they are not at work, they spend most of their lives as part of organisations; that is religious institutions, schools, universities *et cetera*. Therefore, peoples' lives are dominated by an organisational context and it is important that people are able to socially adapt within these contexts as gay individuals. Your contribution will offer insight into the communication between colleagues after a reality-altering event (in this case that is the disclosure of being gay).

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

No risks for participating in this study are envisaged. However, it is possible that you might experience emotional discomfort while discussing some negative experiences of disclosing to others that you are gay. It is not anticipated that this will cause serious harm. However, the name and contact details of an experienced clinical psychologist in your area can be given to you by the researcher for your own account should you feel that you were negatively affected.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

ALL information obtained in this study will be held in strict confidence and only myself and a transcriber will have access to the original data. The transcriber will have no knowledge of your identity. Results will be presented in such a way that you will be unidentifiable. No information that can be easily associated with you will be used in this study. Your identity will be sacrosanct. If a direct quote from you is used, the text will be sent to you and only after you are satisfied and have given consent, will the quote be used in the final document.

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers (with no reference to your identity) may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that the analysis of the results are done properly, including the transcriber, the supervisors, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records will be available only to the researcher, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Please note that your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Whilst a report of the study may be submitted for publication, individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers (with no identifying features) will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected file on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. At the end of the five years hard

copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be stored and if required deleted from the hard drive.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any payment to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary. The researcher will call, mail or meet you at a location that best suites you so that you do not have to incur any costs.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee [I will insert the number of the committee] of the University of South Africa (UNISA). A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Marla Koonin on 082 474 2882 or marlakoonin@gmail.com. The findings are accessible prior to completion if required. Once the dissertation is submitted the findings cannot be adjusted or withdrawn but up until submission they will be available for change or withdrawal. Once submitted they will be available for viewing.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisors Prof Rachél Barker (barker@unisa.ac.za) and Dr Franzél Du Plooy-Cilliers (franzel.cilliers@gmail.com). Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the UNISA Research Ethics Review Committee.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that Marla Koonin as the researcher is asking my consent to take part in this research and has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the narratives and understand that besides the researcher a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality clause) will have access to these recordings whilst transcribing the information.

I understand that I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname……(please print)

Participant
Signature……..Date……

Researcher's Name & Surname……(please print)

Researcher's signature……..Date……

Addendum E: Instruction for narrative inquiry

For a moment, try and think of and visualise in your mind a time when you had a positive experience when you told a colleague that you are gay and one instance where you had a negative experience. You will need to describe the situation in as much detail as possible. The questions next will assist you in answering.

Narrative 1: *In as much detail as possible please describe the following scenario and answer the follow up questions.*

- In your own words, explain one instance in which you told a colleague in your organisation that you are gay and you felt this encounter had a negative effect on your communication with this colleague.
- How did you tell this colleague you are gay?
- Give examples of how and if communication with this colleague changed after you told them you are gay?
- Did this negative disclosure experience in any way influence your decision to tell other colleagues you are gay? And if so how.

Please provide the following information once complete:

What is your work relationship to the colleague in this narrative? i.e. line manager	
How long have you known them?	
What is your profession?	

Narrative 2: *In as much detail as possible please describe the following scenario and answer the follow up questions.*

- Explain one instance in which you told a colleague in your organisation that you are gay and you felt this encounter had a positive effect on your communication with this colleague.
- How did you tell this colleague you are gay?
- Give examples of how and if communication with this colleague changed after you told them you are gay?
- Did this positive disclosure experience in any way influence your decision to tell other colleagues you are gay? And if so how.

Please provide the following information once complete:

What is your work relationship to the colleague in this narrative? i.e. line manager	
How long have you known them?	

ENDS